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BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF "GODWYN'S ORDEAL," "BOTH IN THE WRONG," "HER OWN FAULT,"
"PARTED LIVES," ETC., ETC.

"It is amazing how small a beam of light redeems a soul from the condemnation of utter darkness."

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

"All things tend upwardly, though weak
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him—
All this I knew not, and I failed."

ROBERT BROWNING.



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FAUSTINE

AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN

TWO BAD BLUE EYES

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MR. NOBODY.

Part I.

Can the State thrive
By the destruction of her innocent sons,
In whom a premature necessity
Blocks out the forms of nature, preconsumes
The reason, famishes the heart, shuts up
The infant being in itself, and makes
Its very spring a season of decay?
Can hope look forward to a manhood raised
On such foundations?

WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

T was in the latter days of December, 1829, before the seasons had begun to puzzle and discomfort agriculturists, or "to totter," as Rossetti says, "in their walk." It was a time when the months were supposed to act up fairly to their accustomed character. The Yule-log was still expected to blaze at Christmas time, and March was more associated with the daffodils, "that come before the swallows dare," than with the pale cheeks and red nose of youth, or the dust which brings tears into the eyes of "reverend age." The Shakespearian winter, "when coughing drowns the parson's saw," was still said to be succeeded by the mildness of a spring in which young people were fabled to bathe their faces with dew, and to go a-maying decked in white blossoms under sunlit skies.

Yet the traditions of our fathers were already beginning to be shaken. And the nation, which was suffering from the bad effects of two uncongenial, wet summers, was ill prepared to encounter another January of extraordinary frost and snow. August and September had *not* brought the red ripened corn, the warm, sweet twilights, or the soft harvest moons; nor had the "happy autumn fields" of October been as genial as usual, with brown nuts, ruddy apples, and touches of russet and gold.

Winter seemed to be setting in with greater virulence than

ever, and tramps and beggars—who more than fifty years ago were tolerated nuisances to such an extent that Smith, the “king of gipsies,” was followed to his grave by a hundred children and grandchildren—must have had a bad time of it in their wandering life. But these people were hardened from childhood to endure all sorts of changes of temperature. Not so a poor beggar-woman who, at the time of which I write, had been wandering for weeks on foot in spite of bleak winds, and over almost impassable roads, with a patient, careworn face, and a pathetic, heavy-laden expression like that of an overdriven dumb animal in its silent misery, which attracted more than one passer-by.

When she had set out on her weary walk from the neighbourhood of London, her shoe-leather and bonnet and shawl had been in fair condition; but now the shoes hardly held together, and her shawl—torn here and there in strips—scarcely protected her emaciated person. The little that was left of the once efficient garment was wrapped in folds round the baby which she clutched close to her breast, as if she would communicate to it the small amount of warmth which yet lingered in her own body; and the bonnet, which was so dragged as no longer to protect her head, revealed her unkempt hair, which had once been arranged in the fashion of the period, in loose, full curls, falling on either side of the face, and only parted to show the forehead and eyebrows. The forehead was already furrowed, though the woman was still young, and the large, restless eyes glanced nervously at the clouds which were being driven across the sky by the pitiless wind that tore at the chimney-stacks of the cottagers, sending clattering slates from the roofs of the houses, as she passed through the village.

Now and then she begged an alms, and it was the poor who gave her from time to time of their broken victuals. She was in search of a cottage which she had left in her innocent girlhood in the neighbourhood of a town in —shire, and which for the purpose of my story shall be misnamed Tarringmoor, and she was beginning to despair of ever reaching it. She could not tell herself how she had lived through that walk of nearly two hundred miles. It seemed to her that she had walked day and night, eating from time to time the dry crusts which the pitying poor, so kind to each other, spared from their own need. She would have lain on the ground had it been summer weather, but, as it was, she took shelter in sheds and outhouses. She had wandered from village to village singing for pence. Sometimes she had been hospitably received, and sometimes she had been driven away from the farmers' houses with curses.

It must be acknowledged that the farmers had some reason for being afraid. Tramps were sometimes in league with house-breakers then as now; and when it was not an uncommon

occurrence for men with bludgeons to enter the premises of a farmer, bruising and lacerating his servants, and decamping with all the provisions on which it was possible to lay hands, the dread of tramps was not unfounded.

Even in London a lad had but lately been promised a gratuity for discovering a cave within the iron railings of Leicester Square, in which six or seven sturdy beggars had been accustomed to crouch, smoking their pipes, upon a stone which concealed a number of convenient housebreaking instruments.

So ignorant was the poor mother of the district through which she was travelling that more than once she retraced her steps. But always a sort of instinct taught her to avoid companionship. If she could get out of the highway, she preferred the cart-track in the fields, or the path in the copses. More than once a merciful waggoner had offered her a lift, but she invariably had refused by a shake of the head. Perhaps she was afraid she would have to join in conversation as a return for his hospitality, or perhaps she was aware that even hospitality itself might not be safe. It was possible that she might have heard the tale of how a waggoner lately travelling with goods had been attacked by three fellows in smock-frocks, who knocked him down, severely beating him before they stole his packages, and terrifying to death a young woman who had been in the waggon during the affray.

More than once she had been asked, "How old is your little boy?" But she had never said, "Six months." If she did not exactly resent the inquiry, she seemed not to hear it, and only answered it by hugging him closer to herself. Once or twice, the people who passed had joked about it, making coarse jokes, but she did not seem to hear them, except for the somewhat savage expression which crossed her face as she walked on again, almost barefooted, digging her nails into her own flesh.

All the heroism of which she was capable was owing to the fact of being a mother. Were it not for her child, she would have been a poor, helpless thing, and would long since have sunk down on the ground to die. But as she passed by the happy homes of the rich, with their splendid evergreens, grassy slopes, and holly-trees glistening with the hoar-frost—the ideal old homes for Christmas merry-makings—contrasting strangely with the "dog-hutches" which were considered to be good enough for the poor, she felt as if she herself was one of the broken shards of ruin only fit to be cast into waste places, to add to the useless rubbish-heaps which no sanitary commissioner as yet had cleared away. Were it not for her child, she would rather have been dead.

Often, in a state of fever and temporary delirium, she called on the names of those whom she had known in her girlhood,

and for whom, in some blind way, she was searching again. And then, as the darkness came on, she would feel as if wounded to the heart, putting her hand to her side, and moaning.

That morning she had felt tolerably strong, as if she could accomplish the remainder of the way. The few people whom she passed did not know what to say to her—some of them deciding that she was mad, the shadow on her eyes betraying the sorrowful thoughts within. More than one who had met her on the road had shunned her, crossing over, and passing by on the other side. This solitary, absorbed woman—walking straight on, with her feet almost bare, on the stony roads, clasping her infant so tightly to her, and muttering at times to herself with that strange wildness in her eyes—was not pleasant to encounter on a lonely road.

"The creature is mad," said more than one of the passers-by, with a shrug. "No doubt she has brought her troubles on herself."

For those were days in which the tenderheartedness of our times would have been looked upon as a false and foolish sentimentality. "Mercy," it was said, "can be no relaxation of justice;" and there were certain fatal weaknesses whose criminality seemed to be so ingrained into the character that those who prided themselves on the superiority of the moral sense were ready, with pitiless cruelty, to pronounce it incurable, to be cast out, and trodden under foot. In this stern sense of duty, there remained no room for compassion for the criminal.

And though, in the middle of that day, when the unhappy tramp fainted on a doorstep, there proved to be one farmer's wife with a larger heart, who helped the swooning and suffering sister into a homestead, which was snug and neat, with a look of smiling hope, plenty and comfort about it—every ox and ass about the place sharing in the warm domestic feeling, and seeming to know that it was well cared for—I am afraid it must be admitted that even this gentler and kindlier hostess allowed her conscience to reproach her for a self-indulgent impulse, and never stayed to reflect how Christ Himself, instead of excommunicating publicans and sinners, openly associated with them, and tried to benefit them.

"What is your name?" asked the good woman of the house, after she had given milk to the child, and had told the mother that she would kill it if she kept it out in the cold.

"I—I am not going to tell my name to nobody—I should like to be somebody else—I can't tell why God A'mighty created me," answered the poor soul, impressed by the benevolence in the pitying eyes, while something like a sob choked in her throat.

"Hush! you have been ill—one can see that to look at you, and you will bring the fever back if you talk like that," said the

farmer's wife, involuntarily retreating a little as she put the child back in the mother's lap.

Footsteps were heard at the door. It was the men returning to their dinner.

"Cover me—hide me—don't let anybody see my face—I used to be known in these parts," said the poor unhappy one, rising in alarm from her unusual place of luxury; and the good woman who listened to her shuddered.

An hour afterwards she went in search of the stranger, whom she had concealed in an outhouse. She found her crouched with her child in the furthest corner of the shelter.

"Why do you trouble yourself about me?" was the almost fierce inquiry.

"You be sick," was the answer.

"It is the first words of pity—as any one has said to me—since—my mother——" and she broke off the speech, made with but little of the —shire accent, in an unaccustomed flood of tears.

"Ye've been in Lunnon," answered the elder woman, relapsing into the vernacular, and noticing that the stranger was much younger than she had at first imagined.

She rose slowly, and looked in a dazed way around her.

"I will go away," she said, taking no notice of the question. "I am not good enough for sich as you to come near me. How far is it to Tarringmoor? I can walk it quite well—I am bound for Tarringmoor to-night."

CHAPTER II.

THE afternoon had already begun to wane when the outcast set out again, nor did her hostess try to detain her.

"How much further am I?" she had asked, almost fiercely, turning away from her would-be helper, and relapsing once more into the silence which is the refuge of suffering souls.

Wandering folks were supposed to "overlook" people's donkeys and hens, and though the very severity of the law against vagrants had a tendency to defeat itself, and the vagrants were left pretty much alone so long as they did not interfere with the farmer's hedges and ditches, the kind woman who had sheltered the wanderer in her benevolence was inwardly not sorry to see her depart.

"You be weak-like," she said, as she supplied her with an ash stick which one of the farm-labourers had cut from the hedges, and which she thought might help to steady her steps.

In summer-time the soft downs over which she again began to wander would have been pleasant enough bathed in the

evening light, but now the endlessness of the great moor, its vastness, and the immense expanse of sky above, suggesting the infinite distance of the plain below, was wearying to the eye. She—who in old times had been familiar with this moor, watered by a river of which now the brown and turbulent water rushed over the rocky stones—would have been glad that the darkness was setting in, had not the place been haunted by ghosts and memories of the past.

Strange stories were then afloat, and were confidently believed by the superstitious, of wildernesses infested by evil spirits, the air being filled with the clash of instruments and with the noisy footsteps of demons ready to pounce upon their prey. Some of these familiar stories returned to the 'poor woman's memory. The bare and denuded branches of the little vegetation about the place only added to the ghostliness of the scene, undisturbed but by the cry of a solitary water-hen, beating its wings and trailing its legs as it flew out into the evening air.

It was well for the lonely mother that her state was almost that of stupefaction, or all the strange and haunted sense of a wanderer by night—who hears the dead whisper, and can almost see them pass by white in the moorland mist—would have been hers. Suddenly she knew that she was alone, and uttered one cry—a mother's cry, instantly stifled by the effort which she put upon herself. Only the despairing could have understood her despair. It was but a few miles further to walk. She could see the smoke from the chimneys of Tarring-moor, but her strength was failing her.

On she went again over dead leaves and dry branches, which crackled under her feet, tearing them and making them bleed. She took no notice of the pain; she might not even have felt it. Her eyes were fixed on the distant horizon, on which lingered the tints of the wintry sunset—the colours of the Eternal City. It brought back faint recollections to her mind. How long since she had talked to her own mother in childish language of the gates of amethyst and pearl, how long—how very long—since she had read her Bible! Darker it grew, and her consciousness became more than ever confused. She murmured names now as she pressed the crying child to her bosom—tried to comfort and soothe it, but found she had no nourishment to give it. Yet mechanically, as if she remembered a habit of her girlhood, her eyes began to watch the darkening sky, noting a change in it. The skirts of the mists, which had begun to gather over the distant moon, were now drawn up, revealing clouds which fell away and seemed to retire for a time till the wind should arise like a giant in its fury. She knew that snow was beginning to fall by the small particles which she could feel in the darkness stinging her face. But, by the shorter cut which she had taken, she

had but a few fields more to traverse, and then she would be able to reach Tarringmoor.

If only her strength had not been exhausted! She was compelled to sit under one of the hedges for a few moments, having taken the precaution to wrap the child more closely in the tattered remnants of the woollen shawl. And then, remembering the stick, she tried to assist her tottering steps by using it with one hand, and propelling herself forwards. It was rather limping than walking—limping with great strides, each one more exhausting than the effort which had preceded it, and rendered all the more difficult from the fact that the snow was beginning to fall in larger quantities. The flakes were wrestling in furious dance with the wind, which had risen as she expected, and was flinging the powdery white in blinding masses not only into her eyes and face, but into the closest casements of the cottages, so that in the morning it would be found drifted high into heaps wherever the pitiless wind had flung it.

She had reason to be alarmed. For there had been a night of snow in the preceding year which had caused much consternation and confusion in all parts of the country, at a time when the means of locomotion were fewer and much more difficult than they are now. If the snow were to continue to fall like this, in six or seven hours the roads would be impassable, the coaches would cease running, the mail-bags would have to be brought on horseback at the risk of life; while—on some of the important thoroughfares—there might be carts and wag-gons buried in snowdrifts, causing an obstruction to all traffic. The chance for a solitary traveller would be desperate indeed, and in spite of the unerring instinct which the human mother shares, under peculiar circumstances, with brute beasts, she did not feel as if it would be of any use for her to fight against fate. The cruel blast of the knife-like wind seemed to cut her face almost into pieces, and every drop of blood in her body felt frozen. The child cried louder than before, and with the desperate emergency her consciousness partially returned to her, as she sang wild snatches of songs in a low voice, that it might not be terrified at other sounds.

Was it her fancy, or did the Christmas bells—for it was Christmas week—sound mingled with that blast of wind as she ceased her singing? She was at the outskirts of the town of Tarringmoor, and the churches were close to her. She did not stop to think that the ringing of bells could scarcely be heard, and that the ringers would have ceased practising, as it was past ten o'clock. For to the sore-hearted mother the thought of pouring out her agony at the feet of One born of woman had come to her with the sound of those Christmas bells; and a pitying face—as of One crowned with thorns—seemed to look down at her through the blackness of the clouds.

CHAPTER III.

THE snow that night did not prove to be so serious as had been expected. So furious was the rush of wind, when once its power was thoroughly stirred, that the common people said it had "drev the snaw awaa."

So it seemed to a middle-aged nurse, who was watching that night in the chamber of another young mother, listening to the tumult of wind round a house in one of the poorer streets of Tarringmoor. The woman, who was about forty years old, but who looked older than she was, was urging flakes of fire up the chimney with an enormous pair of bellows.

There was an expression in her face like that in the face of a good but rather sulky dog, with whom the world has not gone straight, and who loves but one thing in it, and that a master or mistress whom he is likely to lose. And the young lady who lay in the bed—for, in spite of her sickness and the poverty of the place, she was unmistakably a lady—had spent a portion of that night with both her arms passed round this faithful creature, relieving her overcharged heart in weeping on her neck. She saw that, though her nurse returned her caresses by stroking and petting—much as the dog, in the same case, would have put out its tongue to lick—there was a strange look about her, and that the eyes, generally good and loving, shone like live coal.

One might have said that, if the intelligence had been high enough to allow of the nurturing of any far-seeing project, there was vengeance in the face, and vengeance of a kind to be dreaded. But, however that might be, there was certainly nothing but love and gentleness in the countenance of the young lady, whom the woman had nursed since her childhood, and to whom she had returned now that all others had deserted her. Though the patient had wept that night on her nurse's neck, hers was naturally a buoyant temperament. She had not been one of the overthoughtful ones who find it hard to rejoice when tales of real suffering are rife, and when they can only stand by, with folded hands, and watch the apparent triumph of evil over good.

Hers, on the contrary, had been a happy, childlike temperament—never perplexed and wavering, and never liable to depression. A bright and cheerful sense of duty would have made duty easy to her, even when it seemed hard to others. And though this was what the doctor had said would probably be her last night on earth, though her dearest wish remained still ungranted, and in Nurse Elspeth's eyes she had endured

one of the cruellest of wrongs, she could still be confident and hopeful. She was one of those who had passed from life to death because they love in a sense which others cannot comprehend, and because their love is stronger than death, and can conquer all wrongs.

Had it been her lot to live, she would have sought to lighten the troubles of others instead of brooding over her own. But the Master had not given her so hard a lot. She had suffered enough for one so sweet and patient in her short trustful life, and now the Master, who had reserved the crown for the brows so young, which had borne but a few of the thorns, was calling for her. She was listening for the sound of His feet, and the sweet, almost unearthly smile upon the face which had succeeded the fit of weeping, and which was so incomprehensible to the lower intelligence of the servant, told that she was already conscious of it.

"Nurse, dear," she said, presently, in a tone which, though weak and faint, could have made a bystander comprehend how, in the days of health and strength, she had possessed, besides her physical beauty, and the *naïve* grace of her slightest gestures, a childlike intonation in her voice, with a fascination in her smile which it could not have been easy to resist—"nurse, dear, I do—not think—he will come now; he said—he—would be here before to-night. I am sure—it is not—his fault."

The nurse, who was a North-countrywoman, did not speak loud enough for her charge to hear, but muttered to herself, "She was a fule to think he ever would come." She did not let her young mistress see her face, but relieved her anger by making greater efforts with the bellows, lashing her indignant feelings into a still greater height of fury as she remembered the hated face of the man who was mentioned, with long falling mustachios, which few people wore then, and which, it was the nurse's impression, were probably worn with the intention of not letting the diabolical nature of his smile be seen beneath them.

"'T puir crater," she muttered to herself; and then, rocking herself backwards and forwards, she groaned, "Think o' yer sowl," till a blast of the pitiless wind blew down the chimney, and made her shudder.

"I do—think—of it—Elspeth," said the gentle voice from the bed, "though—I—may not tell you—all. It will make no difference—now. You must let—me—speak to you. This is the week when God removed—the gulf—between me and Himself—when He became flesh like my little baby here—when He was seen—and handled—born of the Virgin Mary. Do you—think—I would deceive—you—though—I may not—tell you—all?"

There was a pause. The nurse did not answer. Only yesterday some of the servants of the man who owned the moustache, and who was still so mysteriously absent on his travels, had spoken of the marriage as an impossibility, and had laughed her to scorn on the subject. She knew that the doctor thought the same, and who was she to flaunt her opinion in the face of her betters? The world was as bad as possible—it could not well be worse. She believed in her “young leddy,” but felt confident, at the same time, that the poor lamb had been deceived. One peep at her wedding lines would have been better than all this talk; and, if her suspicions were not correct, why could not her nursling show her the proofs?

There was silence in the room. Elspeth, who had risen from attending to the fire, was now feeding the little boy, a baby of some five or six months old. An outsider might have noticed that she eyed it askance when the sick lady was not looking, as if it were the enemy rather than the child of her mistress. From time to time she muttered to herself, in a voice too low for the invalid to hear: “He’s noan coomin’,”—“Chap to coom at my young leddy,”—“Sich careless cratur,”—“But he’ll be soa ailus,”—“Not coomin’, not he, and t’ puir sowl nobbut just deeing.”

She did not see the smile which shone brighter on the face which lay upon the pillow, so bright at times that it seemed to illuminate the room. Exhaustion of body had subdued the lady’s power of speaking, but not of recollection, not of prayer. She seemed again to hear her lover pleading.

“I cannot help it if I love you past all compass and description. The love is as a thing outside myself; I could not help it if I would. They always wanted me to be married to a rich woman—the fortunes of our house required it, they said. Cannot you pity me when I tell you they would like me to make a marriage simply as a business partnership, without one reference to the impulses of the heart? They would like me to give up one of the sweetest and prettiest of girls because a sum of hard cash cannot be handed over to me on the day of my marriage. It is that which makes a coward and a fool of me. But, my darling, after we are married, properly married, I will outwit them. I will go away and make a fortune, and bring it back with me; and meanwhile you must keep our secret, or the whole thing will be a failure.”

She never thought of reproaching him, even in her own mind, for the fact that he had been absent for so long a time that she had pined and died without him. It was characteristic of her that she told herself he had nothing to do with the catastrophe, since there was consumption in her family, and she

would probably have died anyhow. There were times when she had not even missed him, with the dim dawning of a mysterious other love which made her feel brave with the strength of motherhood. She looked at her baby with a yearning look. It had fallen asleep. The whole room was very quiet now. For the wind, which earlier in the evening had howled down the chimney, shaking the bare trees and stripping them of the few russet autumn leaves which yet had remained upon them, had now sunk, like her little child, to sleep, and the nurse had told her that the snow, which a couple of hours before had been driving thickly outside, had also ceased.

All was quiet save for the dropping of an occasional ember in the fireplace, and from the shutterless window the dying woman could see some of the thousands of worlds taking their places again in the sky—where perhaps there were schools for the souls of those who should attain the resurrection.

A sense of wonder at the new and grander life seemed to be gently opening before her. The only trial for one so loving was to go forth to it alone. She spoke rather to herself than to the nurse, when she said, a little languidly :

"I sometimes wish I could take my baby with me. But that would be selfish—his father would want him."

What if, when her child was waking in one world, she would be waking in another—that was the more likely? She felt very feeble, very careworn, going in the path of darkness which her Saviour had trodden before her. Had He not told her, "I go to prepare a place for you?" Perhaps in one of the many mansions which she could see now in the sky? She spoke more feebly.

"Nurse—when—I am gone—take the baby away—at once—this is no place for him—take him to his—father's house. I could not tell you—the reason—while I was living—but when—I am gone—you will find—it out. Take him—he is the heir—to the housekeeper's room—and undress him—the morning—air—will not hurt him. When they see it—they will acknowledge—him. Promise me, promise."

Elspeth gave her one rapid, searching glance, and concluded that she was wandering. The more so because she said, a few minutes afterwards :

"I feel—just—as if—I were a child—again, hardy—and scampering—over the heather—on—the moor. Open—the window, and—let me—breathe the air."

The older woman humoured her by pretending to let in the cold air, and shutting it out again directly, in the same spirit in which she would have given any number of required promises.

Yet she was a little awed in spite of herself by the rapt

expression in the happy face which did not seem like that of any one dying. Something in the manner in which the wide open, lustrous eyes gazed through the window, which she had begged to have opened, at the stars now shining in the sky reminded the nurse of the joyous childhood to which she had just alluded :

When on some gilded cloud or flower,
Her gazing soul would dwell an hour.

"T' puir bairn wur allus a gowk," she muttered again to herself, shivering a little, partly with superstitious fear, and partly with the cold, as she noticed the unusual expression in the shining eyes, which seemed in no way to notice either herself or her child, but to look through them and beyond them in a manner which alarmed her.

She would have been surprised if she could have been told that her young lady was absorbed in prayer—not the sort of prayer to which she had been accustomed herself, consisting mainly in groans and guttural noises, but in that leaning of the faithful and loving soul upon the Everlasting Arms which are beneath it, which from the habit of a lifetime passes in hours of weakness beyond the meaning of words, and even beyond the need of them, and yet realises the Divine Nature in the most perfect way, acting in its uttermost necessity upon the human.

"I cannot pray for myself; I am so weak. I have forgotten the words," the invalid had complained but a few days before.

But now God Himself seemed to be teaching her that the essence of prayer was purely spiritual, the appeal from spirit to spirit for inward light and quickening help; the coming of the child, by a conscious act, into the merciful Father's presence. Even the nurse herself seemed to be suddenly conscious of the opening of a larger window than that which she had sulkily pretended to open, to the supernatural, though she could not have guessed that just then, if her eyes could have been opened like those of Elisha's servant, she would have discovered herself to be the least and most insignificant of the numerous presences in that poverty-stricken room. Suddenly the invalid stretched out her arms. The smile, which melted into an unconscious but muttered "*Abba, Father,*" still more lit up her face.

"Oh! Elspeth, do you not *see*?" she cried, in a stronger voice. "They are here—all of them—— Come, Lord Jesus—I——"

She could not finish the sentence. The colour which had suddenly flushed it crept from her face; but the smile still remained. It was Life—more abundant in the fullest sense—which we so ignorantly call by the name of Death. The sentiment of immortality—the conviction that that which we call the "last act" does not end all for us, but is really a new beginning

of which not only the New Testament, but our own heart and reason, assures us—became overpowering to the more limited intelligence of the looker-on, with a strange and weird conception of the possible fact that the mistress who lay there smiling, in her new, mysterious, frozen beauty, might perchance have the power of punishing her, if she did not obey her behest directly.

She did not like to think much about death herself, but had an idea that her sweet lady, who had wronged no one, had been somehow badly treated, not only by her fellow-creatures, but by the messenger which had so suddenly come for her, and which did not seem to her to be God's gentle ministrant, tenderly sealing the bodily eyes in His holy slumber, while gentler angels carried the rejoicing spirit to that Paradise described of old in metaphoric speech as "Abraham's bosom." Rather was it something horrible, to be struggled with and resisted, and, had it not been for the pride which kept her quiet, the angry woman would have liked to rend the air with her cries, informing her neighbours, after the manner of her more savage ancestors, that Death had been let loose upon its ravages.

But there was no time to be lost. She had first of all to perform the last sad offices for her dear one, that no one should despise her as she lay there, so mysteriously smiling, but still undoubtedly maltreated before her time by the enemy; and then she had to carry out the promise—which she was rather glad than otherwise had been exacted from her—and to get rid as quickly as might be of the hated baby.

CHAPTER IV.

THE daylight had scarcely penetrated into the little house when Elspeth shuffled as quietly as possible down the wooden ladder which led from the little chamber. She wished to accomplish her mission as rapidly as possible, and to return secretly before the other people in the house could discover what had happened.

The most gloomy evening imaginable had been succeeded by a resplendent morning. The bells which rang out in Christmas week were already ringing again, after an interval of silence—now in a hallowed and consecrated strain, and now again in a merry din, only suitable for a time of human festivities and gladness. Elspeth could not have told the names of the

hymn tunes which were chiming, and awakening no responsive chord in her heart, but she knew that the burden of them was "Rejoice evermore," and to her they sounded like a mocking injunction, when all that she cared for in life seemed to be in ruin and collapse.

The river in the neighbourhood of Tarringmoor was frozen. It was an unusual occurrence, and she knew that on the following evening there was to be a scene of holiday-keeping, when a number of men would be balancing themselves on steel blades, by the flare of torches, and amidst the jocund laughter of those who would be sure to detect the awkwardness of the natives. And, though the women did not then trust themselves to be whirled about on skates, there would be plenty of amusement for the fair sex.

Elspeth could imagine the bustling crowds upon the banks of the river, the pedlars selling articles of food and dress, and more than one charlatan willing to turn a nimble penny.

Already there were tall young fellows busily sweeping the ice, and hanging lamps between the ribs of the skeleton trees.

But all the kindness in the woman's heart had been poisoned. She turned with a sickening sensation of envy from the thought of the happy actors and friendly spectators in the merry scene. Had not her young lady as much right to enjoy herself as the best of them? The despair and contempt which never yet cured any grief were in the faithful, unreasoning creature's heart, with all that tendency to querulous fault-finding, all that distress and bewilderment at things difficult to be understood, which, in a more modern stage of development, have contributed towards the making of many a poor uneducated *petroleuse*.

Elspeth had received few kind words and few encouraging smiles during her somewhat hard, dry life, and these had come from her "young ledly," who, she was ready to conclude, had been too good for this earth. And there was now no one to teach the embittered, broken-hearted woman that to dwell on the melancholy hopelessness of some aspects of human life, and not to believe side by side with it in the loving mercy of a God, is to be dragged down to the misery of a suffering brute.

The passion which possessed her had set her usually sallow complexion in a blaze, and she was ready to stamp her foot as she remembered that that evening, when the men and the commoner people would be amusing themselves on the ice, a splendid ball would be given in Tarringmoor, at which all the beauty and fashion in the neighbourhood would be collected, and in which the merry dance was to be kept up to a late hour, with every luxury and delicacy of the season, so that the New Year should be ushered in with heart-felt glee. A number of

fine ladies would be visiting in the neighbourhood for the purpose, and the woman cursed them in her heart.

"Ech th' owld warld is jest so ill, it wur better it wur doon wi' a'together, it nubbut graws wurser," she said to herself, in a mixture of her own dialect and her young lady's southern speech, little knowing that such sentiments would in the future be honoured by the name of "pessimism," and that philosophical ideas, bearing a remarkable resemblance to her own dreary lament, would fall glibly from the lips of weaklings who would like to be thought wise in depreciating human life.

She gave a long, searching look at the infant, and began more than ever to realise how impossible it would be for her to take the child to the big mansion in the neighbourhood, from which the master, the only nobleman of whom Tarringmoor could boast, was now absent on his travels. The common-sense on which she prided herself had always convinced her that her young lady told an incredible story, and that the "proofs" of which she had spoken would prove to be a delusion of the poor girl's sick fancy, whilst she herself would be hunted from the lodge-gates with insult for venturing to speak of the reputed father.

Sheer fright of the dead body had for the time overpowered Elspeth's usual fair share of wits, but her sense of the absurdity of the situation seemed by degrees to be returning to her in the clear, keen, morning air. There would be a ghastly make-believe, a forced joke about the thing, which would lead not only to cruel observation, but to cynical satire from the very men-servants of the establishment. True, her lady had told her to inquire for the housekeeper, and to seek for the *proof* of the child's birth in the housekeeper's private room. But the distinction of rank in a servants' hall, the artificial demarcations imitated from masters, would quite preclude such a proceeding. Elspeth was poorly dressed, the housekeeper would spurn her and snub her.

Hitherto Elspeth had been walking very slowly. There seemed to be growing upon her a sort of progressive "locomotor ataxy;"—the doctor's gorgeous name for failure to direct one's own steps—both in the physical and the moral sense. But suddenly, as she perceived that she was nearing the nobleman's park, the remnant of her courage deserted her, and she fled. Fled, scarcely knowing or caring where her footsteps might take her, towards a barren upland strewn with boulders, where a few of the poorer folks, washerwomen and others, were known to congregate, to pick up a scanty living; for they were close upon the moors, and this suburb was well suited to the drying of linen.

A dreary, desolate place it was, gleaming just now with the

cold gleam of snow, which had fallen earlier on the previous night, and had collected here and there in heaps. The wind would be shrieking and moaning here when it had ceased to shriek in other places, and it had risen a little now, and seemed to be playing with a few of the scattered flakes, and rushing along with them against their will. A dog, a shepherd's colley, whined pitifully, following Elspeth, as, for reasons which she could not have given, she passed on with the baby, which was cooing, and even attempting to make more articulate sounds, so delighted was the little fellow with the change from the sick-room.

Elspeth scarcely knew whither she meant to take him. She had no respect or sympathy for the bright little creature, whom his mother had so ardently loved, as a fresh link from the chain let down from heaven to earth from the ever-working Spirit. Elspeth, as a pessimist, was only reminded by the little one of the short time that the joy of many mothers lasts, when the babies they love are either parted from them betimes, or live to grow up in a separation of heart which is often worse than death. She remembered that the mother had said she wished it had been possible for her to take the child with her..

Elspeth, who had so loved her, re-echoed the words, as, scarcely noticing what she was doing, she followed the dog, which, alternating its whine with short deep barks, seemed to be leading the way somewhere, she did not care where. Yet she could not help remarking that the animal seemed to have its nose close to the ground, and that in the direction in which it led there were footprints in the snow, as if some one else had tramped that way before her.

The dog's whine became more eager, and at last it stood quite still before a large and desolate-looking barn, the door of which was ajar. Elspeth pushed it more widely open, her mind still in that strained state, and so fully occupied with keeping back its own woes that she troubled herself little about any other grief which was foreign to her own private source of sorrow. But she could not help noticing that, in a sitting posture under the shed, and upon a heap of dirty straw, another woman sat with another child in her arms, and that the child was pressed closely to her bosom, as if she too would protect it from the cold. There was need to do so, for it was freezing hard, and an old neckerchief, more like a rag, which lay at this other woman's feet, was stiff and frozen.

"What a to-do the creature was making! It was no worse for her than for others, and many wanderers must have been homeless that dreary night," was the first selfish thought, as Elspeth noted the coincidence. But her next idea was one of horror, for, on calling to her fellow-sufferer, the latter did not

seem to take notice. Her attitude was easy and peaceful as that of a child asleep, but, on closer inspection, it was evident that she and the baby in her arms were dead.

To do Elspeth justice, she was not quite destitute of feeling, as she took off her own cloak, and tried to pile it on as clothing, hoping that the warmth might help to restore vitality. But such an event was too common an occurrence, in days when the sufferings of the poor were thought to be no one's particular business, and when Christian benevolence had not taken the more active forms which it now so commonly assumes. It was easy to see that what had happened was nobody's fault, and that no one could take in such a wretched creature, not feeling sure of what she might be up to. Easy, too, to surmise that, when the snow had whirled about her during the night, she could not have been able to find her way blindfold, and might have been bewildered as to landmarks. But, though the Yorkshirewoman had no poetry about her, it struck her with some pathos that the Eternities, as Carlyle would have expressed it, which had looked down on the sons of Time during the preceding night, should have witnessed the death of two poor mothers of boys of much the same age, and resembling one another.

Both the children were of about the same size and complexion, while the hair of both was brown, and both had that vague indeterminateness in the other features characteristic of baby-life in general. What a good thing it would be if both were dead !

The thought had no sooner occurred to a mind capable of strong emotions, explosive passions, but with a want of sufficient principle to resist bad suggestions, and hardly able to exert any form of self-control, than it was followed by another thought with the rapidity of lightning. How the poor outcast got into that shed was altogether a mystery, and was likely to remain a mystery for all the pains that people took to inquire into such things. The infant in Elspeth's own arms was now crying with cold and hunger. A little more would suffice to kill it, and it was not *her* fault that it had been taken out according to its mother's suggestion. Appearances would be all in favour of the plan which seemed to be suggested to her by Providence itself.

She did not wait to parley with temptation, but, hastily stripping the infant in her arms of its somewhat handsome cloak and embroidered upper garment, she placed it in the arms of the dead woman, and—noticing that fortune seemed in every way to favour her scheme, since the underclothes of both children were more or less ragged, from the want of means, which had forced her to part with some of her lady's

baby-linen—she dressed the dead child in the warm cloak and long embroidered dress, wrapping the other up as closely as possible in the woollen, though ragged shawl.

No one else but herself had ever looked closely at her mistress' child ; no one but the doctor and the landlady in whose house they lodged had ever been allowed to come at all near to it, since not a breath of scandal that the servant could prevent had ever been suffered to cross the threshold. Nor did her conscience reproach her much as she fed the living baby once more with some soft cake, which she had carried with her for the purpose, and noticed that a little colour crept into its cheeks. Such religion as she possessed—a bitter form of Calvinism—had made her a fatalist ; and reasoning with herself that, if it were the Lord's will, some neighbour entering the barn would surely save the child's life ; and, if it were not His will, her lady's wish would be granted : she placed the little one in the dead woman's arms, and, regardless of its frightened cries, once more fled.

CHAPTER V.

HAVING once yielded to a sudden temptation, there was not only no going back for Elspeth, but no time to be lost in conscientious regrets, even had such regrets been likely to occur to her. For I must ask my reader to remember that this woman had been reared in a comparatively remote period of the century, when such things as School Boards were unheard of. She had associated with "factory hands," whose instincts were somewhat savage, who were utterly unable to read and write, and who, some of them, as in Moslem countries, not only regarded women as marketable commodities, to be beaten or kicked in the absence of cock-fighting, bear-baiting, or other soul-stirring amusements, but thought that mothers, in the absence of their proper lords, had more or less absolute rights over the persons of their offspring. Probably, in spite of the slight amount of Calvinism which had been grafted upon Elspeth's otherwise heathenish creed, an ethnologist of the present day would have looked upon her with interest, as a "survival" of the untutored childhood of the nineteenth century, just as the stone axe is a relic of pre-historic times.

Had any tender and pitiful remembrance of the terrified child, screaming and stretching out its little arms to her, been likely to linger in her fierce bosom, it would have been ex-

tinguished by the sight of two pretty, smiling women, who were tripping from the steps of one of the houses to get into a closed coach, as she came back into Tarringmoor. They were apparently about the age of her own young "leddy," and the contrast struck her cruelly, as she listened to their light laughter. One had on a dress-hat of pink satin, ornamented with ostrich feathers. Her pelisse and tippet were trimmed with marten-skin; a Chantilly lace veil was drawn over her comely face, and her little feet peeped in and out "like mice" in her fawn-coloured boots. The other had a walking-dress of light cashmere, quite unsuitable to the weather, as the corset displayed a cambric chemisette, only half hidden by a chinchilla tippet—sleeves *à la Caroline*, as they were then called—and pale-lavender gloves.

I fear that Elspeth cursed them in words which it would not do to retail here, not only from the recollection of another stiff white toilette on a fairer form in an upper room, but because the money which had been spent on their "fal-lals" might have saved the taxes spent on such articles as sugar, candles, and soap, taxes which were severely felt in such a period of distress.

The hate in her heart seemed to aid her natural shrewdness. What had these Jezebels to do with such worldly vanities in this life which was so full of death; when but one of their expensive fur or feather dainties, sold for what it could fetch, would have helped Elspeth to purchase dainties for the sweet soul which had been left to die? She clenched her hand and ground her teeth, being in that frame of mind which made her thankful for that which her minister had told her would be the fact, that God would burn up this miserable world, and she hoped He would burn it as soon as possible.

She had no one but the doctor to outwit now, and her natural shrewdness told her that would be pretty easy, since the distress had been so great among country practitioners that many of them had been unable to keep their families, and were embarking for America and the settlement on the Swan River. The doctor who attended her poor lady had had difficulty enough, as Elspeth knew, to provide sufficient food for the mouths of his own children. One death, more or less, from exposure to cold, amongst the common slaughter of innocents from causes which were preventible, would not, as Elspeth knew, be likely to attract much attention.

And, though she had her tears and lamentations ready, she did not suppose that too much attention would be accorded to her trouble as she stopped at the doctor's shop, where the blue and red lights had been burning all night. The most benevolent of all professions had not then learnt to be afraid of lowering

itself by allowing the common people to call its dispensaries "shops," nor did it shrink with horror from defiling itself by having anything to do with exchange and barter.

As she had expected, the doctor was not too sympathetic.

"What? the mother was dead, and the child sick a'ready, and yet you took it out in the cold morning air—what a fool you must be!" said the young man, whose assistance she thought it wise to seek, as she told her plausible tale, and he also told her how senseless it would be to try to restore life by inadequate means, for the boy had been evidently dead more than an hour already. "And the best thing that could happen, too, though that does not excuse you for your atrocious carelessness, woman," said the young man, as he somewhat roughly unfastened for the second time the cloak and dress, and in so doing dislodged a tiny parcel of something which had been sewed into the bosom of the little dress, and which fell down at Elspeth's feet. She coloured slightly as she picked it up, and thrust it into her pocket, determining to examine it at leisure when she reached her home.

In spite of her nervousness she was somewhat angry with the doctor for his haughty, repellent manner, and resented the fact that such a manner was reserved for the "tag-rag and bob-tail," whilst he could be suave enough to the "quality," and was not above the snobbishness which made him think it a possible stepping-stone to a fortune to have a right to feel the pulse of a lord, or prescribe for a duchess.

"There, don't stand blubbering there any more—my time is precious, and a mistake of this kind can't be undone," he said impatiently.

What could the fool expect of him? he had enough to do to attend to the living. And, indeed, when medical science had still to make such strides that the idea of inflating the lungs of still-born children was spoken of as a curious experiment only attempted by Paris *savants*, and problematical in its results; when anonymous letters had sometimes to be written to mayors and coroners, before a jury was summoned to investigate mysterious deaths; and when itinerant vendors or other unfortunate men could be discovered dead, with their skulls fractured, and jurymen trouble themselves so little about their fate that, from want of evidence, they were content to bring in, as their most decisive verdict, "Found dead, but how or by what means cannot be determined"—Elspeth need not have feared that there would be much ado about a baby's death.

Meanwhile the little one, which had been so heartlessly abandoned, was not so forsaken as it might have seemed to human ken. Doubtless its guardian angel was watching over

it; and without speculating as to the true meaning of old-world myths, such as that of Romulus and Remus, there was certainly another angel at hand in the shape of a four-footed brute. The dog—of whom we are ready so hastily to assume that it is soulless, because we know nothing about the nature of its soul—proved itself in this case, as in many other cases equally well authenticated, to be kinder than a specimen of degraded humanity. It was anxious, though excited, as a mother might have been, keeping, as it were, one eye upon the door of the barn that it might watch what was passing outside, and another on the child, which at intervals it endeavoured to amuse by wagging its tail and barking.

I am afraid that this latter kindly mark of attention, which involved some expenditure of strength on the part of the faithful animal, was scarcely needed in this instance, as the child had hardly reached that stage of existence which would have enabled it to appreciate such courtesies. A partial mother might have declared it was "taking notice," but it was fortunate for it that that "notice," which had reached the extent of enabling it to make odd noises when it was in Elspeth's arms in the open air, did not render it at all uncomfortably aware of its awful companionship. Had it remained with all that was left of its mother in the strangly-curtained room, with the mysteriously-covered elevation on the white-sheeted bed, it would still have been in merciful ignorance of the spectre, Death. But in this case, after it had comforted itself with its cake, and had sucked the remnant of the crumbs from its podgy fingers, it discovered nothing strange in the near neighbourhood of an apparently sleeping face, from which the premature wrinkles had been smoothed. With the absence of instinct so characteristic of the human infant, it apparently took the face for that of its mother, and, having exhausted itself with crying, and finding the warmth of the old shawl in this protected part of the shed to be better than the cold outside, it betook itself philosophically to sucking its thumb.

From the thumb the next stage was that of taking an early siesta, a proceeding of which the dog appeared to approve. But when the nap was followed by the infallible consequence, that of waking and becoming aware of the pangs of hunger, and when its tiny fingers, which were somewhat numbed, began to search for its mother's face, and only came in contact with what was marble cold, there was no resource but to burst into a terrified howl. The dog caressed it—otherwise licked it—as I suppose its tender predecessors caressed the dying Lazarus; but the pathetic expression in its faithful eyes deepened, as if it recognised its utter inefficiency under the circumstances. Indeed, it had some reason to be depressed in

spirits, being with all good-will more incapable than the fabled she-bear. The infantile howls became gradually feebler ; the baby was growing weak, and the dog, sitting on its haunches, and lifting its muzzle as if in appeal, gave utterance to one of those long, lamenting, almost human whines which seemed to protest against the fate that was hovering over the child.

At that moment a woman, with a plaid shawl thrown over her head, after the manner of the Yorkshire or Lancashire operatives, was passing the shed. She was not one of the factory hands, though, from her appearance, an outsider might hastily have concluded so. The expression of her face had nothing of that bold, unsexed, and almost supercilious stare characteristic of too many of the women employed at the Tarringmoor factories. It was, indeed, remarkable for its patience and docility. It might once have been good-looking, but there was now a grayness of the complexion, a languor in the carriage of her thin, somewhat gawky figure, and an appearance of ill-health which told the tale that Mary Burton was no native of these parts, and that insufficient clothing, poor living, keen air, and the searching winds of Tarringmoor were breaking down a constitution ill calculated to endure privation. She and her father had been born and bred in the neighbourhood of London, but had been unfortunate, like others, in a period of agricultural depression, when work had been difficult to obtain both in Sussex and Middlesex.

It was not in the vegetable world alone that the snows and frosts of two successive winters were beginning to be perceptible. But, among the occupants of land in many of the English counties, there was said to be a great deal of distress. Sadness and disappointment were already experienced by those who were beaten down by the rigid nature of the laws, and seemed fruitlessly to spend their energies upon the soil. The Burtons had seen better days ; but when starved women had been found in wretched habitations near Battersea literally famished, with some straw in the corners of their rooms, but no covering of any sort, old Jem Burton—who had been tempted by the account of the lace-work which was going on in —shire, much as Whittington was tempted by fables of gold to be picked up in London—had spent his last remaining shilling in determining to take his daughter to offer the assistance of her deft fingers to the lace-workers at Tarringmoor, rather than remain to starve at Battersea.

He commenced by spending his shillings on coach-fares, but, when his little store of silver was exhausted, he and his daughter were obliged to trudge. Sanguine still, he had comforted Polly by the reflection that, if they had carried more money on their persons, rogues might have stolen it. But a

short time before, as he reminded Polly, a poor working-woman had been murdered on this very road for the sake of the eight shillings which she carried in her pocket, and which she had earned by her honest toil. The verdict had been, "Accidental Death;" and Jem, who did not read his newspaper for nothing, had commented on the circumstance to his uncomplaining daughter.

They had reached the El Dorado at last, which honest Jem believed in, because he prided himself on the possession of thews and muscles, and was still able enough to perform a day's work, while he believed that his Polly would be good at the lace-making. But, if labour was a little more plentiful for Jem, Polly preferred her own quiet modes of life to the gossiping, jealous, and immodest ways of some of the Torrington lace-makers. Rather than expose herself to be contaminated by association with them, she had preferred to do a little washing, and to take in some sewing. And there was worse than all this, on which the woman, who never openly complained, was always secretly brooding. Her father's determination—a set purpose from which it had been impossible to deter him, but which she, with her better wisdom, had known from the first to be blind and obstinate—of coming to a strange town, had broken Polly's heart and blighted her life.

The man with whom she had kept company for years, and who was angry with her for leaving Battersea with her father, and not remaining and facing her position with him and all its difficulties, had seen her off with specious speeches and manifold promises to write to her, but had jilted her as soon as her back was turned, and had married a more comely and younger woman. Since then, Polly Burton had tried to face the future with a settled determination to make the best of a life from which she believed all the brightness had gone. She would not deceive herself, or make friends with other people. She believed herself to have done with affection of all sorts, unless it was that for her aged father.

She was passing this shed this wintry morning with a feeling that she had outlived all tender desires. The loving flame, which had once shone so brightly in her heart, burned very low indeed; the last sparks which made life sweet to her were nearly out. And the divine love seemed to have almost gone with the human, so faint was her interest in anything which God had made, so dull and stolid her determination to plod through her allotted task, so weary her soul. She was almost angry with the people who had given her a little washing, which involved the painful task of fetching it on such a bitterly cold morning. The latter stage of existence with this woman seemed at present as if it would be worse than the former; and yet the

former, in which the love in her nature had once asserted itself, and made toil pleasant to her, had left its handwriting in that look of endurance and docility on the sickly face, and her Father in Heaven had not forgotten her.

She was passing the shed with her head cast down, feeling like a machine, capable of so many hours' work every day, and only a little wearier and colder than usual, when the child's fatigued wail struck upon her ear. Her first thought was the severe one, that it was "all of a piece with the other ill behaviour of these set-up hussies," the way in which they neglected their children ; but her second thought brought a stirring of some warmth about her heart, as the infant's cry recalled a recollection of her own childhood, of how carefully she used to tend a little baby sister when her mother was otherwise occupied, and how she had loved it. Her third thought, that if her life had been differently ordered she might have had little ones of her own to sweeten and beautify it, brought a sudden wave of colour to her pale, thin cheek. Then she was aware that her dress was being gently pulled by the dog, and that the colley looked as if it could almost read her secret thoughts, and answer :

"No, you are not a machine. You had once a passionate, loving nature, with a woman's longing after domestic life, for all you pretend to be made of cast-iron, and try, in spite of your ill health, to be always in working order."

She yielded to the dog, and let it draw her into the shed, when, lo! the baby stretched out its little arms to her and wept. And, though it was a matter-of-fact and rather comical travesty of the sweet old idyll of the Egyptian princess with heart warming to the abandoned babe of the despised Hebrew slave, yet the effect was much the same with the like "touch of nature." In both cases the woman, in the simple language of Scripture, "had compassion," and in that of Polly Burton it was as if a spring was suddenly touched which hitherto had been lying dormant in her nature, revealing a fund of hidden treasure. She was, though she knew it not, emphatically a mother, though she had never brought forth a child, and motherhood in such a case is more unselfish. From the moment that she took the forsaken little one, and laid it near to her heart, wrapping it about with her own warmer garments, pressing her lips on its lips that she might help to keep up the life in it, a new and softening influence brought about a change of feeling in her.

Her old father, Jem Burton, found that evening that he might as well have argued with a wilful little girl who had just had a new doll given to her, and only hugged it the closer when urged to give it up, as to try to remind Polly that nobody required her to burden herself with "other folks' brats."

"'Tis a child of ill fame," muttered old Jem, whose sturdy honesty made him feel as if he and his would be decidedly ill-treated if the Almighty did not visit the sins of other people upon them from generation to generation. His daughter refused to argue about it, knowing nothing of the perplexing and mysterious question of indwelling and transmitted evil by which the finer sense of justice has been chilled. She could not answer, because she did not know that, if there be evil in the parent, it *must* be transmitted, not by any arbitrary reintroduction of ignominy into the stock of humanity, but by the natural and inevitable law which reproduces in the brain and character of the child, the inherited or acquired peculiarities of habit and thought in the brain of the parent.

"From generation to generation," repeated old Jem, not knowing that he was dabbling in the region of metaphysics, and smacking his lips with a sense of his own superior righteousness over the text. "Tak' my word for it, Poll, the little un 'ill be hup to no good. And if you tak' 'im, my gell, from those as by rights hought to kep 'im, it'll only be the prison or the gallows. If ee comes of gaol-birds, a gaol-bird ee'll be."

Then the woman's heart broke out.

"Shame on yer, father! As if the Lord meant us to keep a-harpin' on that sayin', and t' forget the t'other as He comes to save the lost."

"Ain't it 'gainst yer conscience, gell?" persevered the father, honest and ever self-sufficient, and he went on, as his fashion was, making the best of every odd moment, and chanting an old-fashioned hymn to the strokes of his axe, as he cut up some wood which his daughter had gathered to help with the fire.

"Some folks talks of their consciences when they are fools, and of their dooty when they is downright cruel," answered Polly, who wished her father would not sing, as he always sang out of tune, and somehow the false notes jarred more than ever with the new melody which was singing on deep down in her heart that night.

She had washed the little fellow, fed him with milk, and propped him upright with a pillow on a fragment of old rug covering the stones before the fire. And the baby cooed with delight, stretching out its podgy little fists to the fire, and making futile attempts to catch hold of one of its pink toes and suck it.

"He be blythe and bright-eyed as a young rabbit. And yet his mother was a bad 'un, and the parish 'ill hev to bury 'er," pondered Jem, with whom the divine virtue which covers a multitude of sins did not come naturally, and was no part of his religion. "That folks as was honest should do their best for

theirsels," was his creed, and his head shook a good deal as he thought of his daughter's strange and unexpected obstinacy, of the injury which she was inflicting on the State, according to the man's rough politics—and Jem Burton, as a London-bred man, liked his pipe and his newspaper—by "encouragin' o' paupers."

The recollection of the few hard-gained earnings, which Mary had carefully tied up in a stocking, did not do much to make him more sympathetic, when his daughter, who had not the gift of speech, tried to express something which she had dimly in her mind about the Pharisees, who had their moral sense "upside down, and thought they was a-doing right when they was all the time only a-doing wrong." She did not venture to hint that she would have been glad to help the poor dead creature, whose pathetic face had impressed her imagination as it would certainly not have impressed it if she had only seen it in life. Help in her case would have been too dilatory to be efficient. But Polly's sympathies, since she had suffered cruelly herself, were all on the woman's side instead of on that of the man; and as she had looked at that forsaken sister, and registered a secret vow to cherish her child, something in Polly's heart had cried out against the man who had been allowed to go scot-free, and who had robbed the wretched creature of her fame.

"I'd ha' given her shelter, and hev braved it hout wi' 'em all," she thought, as she remembered that no one had come to the poor woman's help.

CHAPTER VI.

POLLY BURTON never regretted the exceptional fit of obstinacy which caused her, in defiance of her father, to adopt the dead woman's child. True, during that first winter, the room, which had been bare of furniture before, became barer than ever, now that there was an extra mouth to feed. But when the spring came, and the March dust was succeeded by warm April rains, Polly got out between her hours for washing, and admired, as she had never done before, the varying shades of green contributed by the larch, oak, ash, and chestnut in the pathways by the river. She put down the child to crawl when she was hanging up her clothes to dry near the moor, and she noticed as she had never yet noticed the buttercups and primroses, because the boy crowed and tried to gather them. It was

as if a new spring had come into her hitherto blank life, and as if fresh spring corn, giving promise of rich aftermath, was practically being sown in the poor dead heart.

As the first few years went on, the struggle for the necessities of life was sometimes a little difficult. But the child, who had as yet shown none of those evil tendencies at which old Jem had so darkly hinted, was always merry as a lark, when he had apparently little to satisfy his bodily cravings.

He was naturally small and thin, and could not be otherwise than ill-clad, and looked like a lamb that had been sheared of its wool before it had grown to be a sheep. But, in spite of all these drawbacks, the lamb seemed to thrive fairly well, and Jem Burton had now an infinitely better prospect before him than he had enjoyed for the last three or four years. He was not yet free from anxiety, but could look forward to the time when the boy would help him. The period was already drawing nigh when "Ile Jem," as he had been dubbed by the neighbours, would be sent for his schooling, and as much learning was not considered necessary for boys who could turn an odd penny in the fields fifty years ago, both Polly and her father considered that the desired event was tolerably near at hand.

Meanwhile the family, which had been absent from Rashleigh Hall, returned to Tarringmoor when "Ile Jem" was four years old. The old Sir George was dead, and the new one had come into his own, but it was rumoured that the present Sir George Rashleigh had never been the same man since the death of his first wife, while he was absent on his travels. He made no secret, after his father's death, of the fact which he had always intended to make publicly known, that he had been privately married, but that his wife and infant child had both of them died before he had received the news of the birth of the latter. It was contended on his behalf that the letter had miscarried, but it was also said that he blamed himself; and, however that might be, the fact was certain that no one dared allude to the circumstances of his early life in George Rashleigh's presence, his temper being uncertain.

He had married again, as in duty bound, but his second wife was not much richer than the first. Rumour declared that, in a violent fit of anger, he had vowed to his father that he would never marry a woman who had money, and the same busy rumour hinted again that he married his second wife rather from gratitude than love. She was an Italian whom he had met abroad—many years older than himself—and report said that the young Sir George had been nursed by her through a fever which nearly proved fatal, and which had prostrated him

when he first received the news of the death of his former wife and child. He might be grateful, but the Tarringmoor people concluded of him that he was neither affectionate nor genial to the lady whom he had married or any one else. He had now another infant heir, nearly a year old, and the decadence of ancient families, with their gradual impoverishment and consequent decline in honour, was said to press heavily on the spirits of the young father. It seemed to be his doom, as well as that of his ancestors, to see his broad lands heavily mortgaged, and fated to pass into alien hands. Already some of the family plate was said to have gone to the collectors, and other articles of *vertu* were destined to follow in the same humiliating direction.

Some of the Rashleighs had been extravagant, but no one could account for the aggregate of money which, as the price of land had increased, had literally passed through their hands, the tenant farmers not seeming to be much richer than they who roughly tilled the soil years before. It was said that the incessant and reckless activity of self-destructive force was already beginning to be at work in the age, and old Tories shook their heads.

The Rashleighs had been a handsome race, and the present Sir George Rashleigh was no exception to the rule. He was tall and well-featured, carrying his head a little forward after the manner of the Rashleighs generally. His profile was considered by connoisseurs to be exceptionally well cut ; and the Italian lady, some fifteen years his senior, was said to have fallen in love with him for his manly beauty. The Rashleighs, in the good old times, kept pretty well to the rules of life laid down by a gay poet ; rules of hunting and banqueting in the open air in autumn and summer, and of carousing by the fire in winter days. Of these traditions, George Rashleigh retained but one extravagance. He came of a hunting race, and probably the hunting would be the last thing which either he or his descendants would be inclined to give up. He still managed to keep half-a-dozen hunters, and, when remonstrated with on the subject of this outlay, he would lose his temper, and declare that—rotten as the times might be—it would be long before rents and profits would fall to so low an ebb that country gentlemen would be obliged to deny themselves the solace of their hunters.

It was somewhat before the days when merchants and manufacturers were beginning to be munificent patrons of fox-hunting ; but already there were signs that commercial prosperity might follow on the depression of the agricultural, and George Rashleigh was among the number of those enthusiasts who would rather have seen their country mansions follow in the

way of the old monasteries than admit that so dire a calamity as the surrendering of sport must be inflicted upon him as a punishment for the want of foresight of his ancestors. Other modes of economy, however drastic, might be adopted, with the exception of one—that of intermarriage with the commercial classes. In the opinion of his family, George had fallen low enough in marrying, as his first wife, the penniless orphan daughter of an old Yorkshire parson. But just as it was necessary that he should ride to cover and wage war against the vulpine race, so was there the need that he should remember his blue blood and the monumental brasses. He had angered his father by declining to marry a rich lady of title because she had a plain face, but he also inherited the prejudices which had prevented all the Rashleighs from connecting themselves with the “commercial classes,” and so re-invigorating with new blood the decaying stock, as well as the ill-supplied coffers of the Rashleigh family. He shared another tradition with his father, which enabled him to keep his hounds. That tradition was, that one might borrow, or mortgage, but never actually sell, one’s estate.

CHAPTER VII.

THE motto which is usually attributed to Madame de Pompadour might have been adopted by Sir George Rashleigh—“After me the deluge.”

It did not serve to improve his temper when, on one November afternoon, he rode back from a tolerably successful “run,” and got separated from some of his friends, to remember—as he passed from the open country into the solitary woodlands—that the “deluge” must come on his infant heir. The sharp frosts which had set in about the end of October had had the effect of bringing the leaves off the trees, so as to make the district through which he rode nearly as bare as in a dreary December. This was really an advantage, as it prevented George Rashleigh from losing his way amongst the innumerable narrow “rides” which he had to traverse in the wood after leaving the moor. But the prospect round him was exceptionally melancholy, and in his present mood he fell into a dreary reverie, from which he was startled by hearing a little piping voice, “Gi’ us a penny, sir,” not in the usual dialect of the countryside, but in an unmistakable cockney intonation caught from the Burtons, who had been in London.

George Rashleigh could not have described the odd and indefinable sensation with which he encountered a pair of bright, shrewd eyes, of the same colour as the wild hyacinths which used to bloom plentifully in the fields round Tarringmoor in spring time—eyes which glittered under a brow crowned by matted, curly locks, of a dark brown tint mingled with tufts which had been bleached fair by the summer sun. The eyes and the hair belonged to a very small boy of some four or five years of age, dressed in a sort of wisp of ragged clothing, which clung to the upper part of his person and left the little brown legs bare, except where they were covered with splashes from the brooks and country roads. There was nothing in the little imp to account for the odd mixture of feeling with which Sir George regarded him, but the child, getting no answer, and beginning to suppose that something was expected of him, tried to put his accomplishments into practice, and turned a somersault, rags and all, after the most accredited manner in which old Jem had trained him. The unexpected exploit had the effect of startling Sir George's horse, and, with one of those quick revulsions of emotion, not unusual with passionate people, the baronet raised his whip, and shouted :

“Get out of my way, you little beggar. What is your mother thinking of not to send you to school?”

Human consciousness is so complex that, if George could have analysed his feeling, he would have seen that he had almost involuntarily lashed himself into a rage to escape the softer recollections which were so oddly associated with the child—an experience which, I believe, is also not uncommon to irascible dispositions—so strange are the mysteries of the inner life, and the conflict of evil and good in the hidden nature of a man.

The tone of his speech had the effect of arousing a similar anger in the boy, and, as soon as the man had gone, little Jem looked after him, clenching his little hands, and with ugly wrinkles on his young face.

But the baronet was a magistrate, and had returned to his native place determining to do his duty to it, and to get the people into better order, ruling them, if possible, with firmness as well as justice. He did not see much occasion for suavity where the poor were concerned, but he prided himself on being energetic in rectifying abuses, and would have been considerably astonished if any one could have told him that he appeared to those whom he considered to be his inferiors as the hardest of taskmasters, and that they looked upon him as a monster with a heart as hard as a millstone.

He kept little Jem in his mind, and when he next met the boy with the woman who had acted as his mother, and who,

since she had solaced herself with her scheme of benevolence, appeared to have a noble as well as a pensive face, he told Polly that the little one was old enough to be at school, and that he should not be allowed to run lazily about these rambling out-skirts, with cottages straggling as if they, like their inhabitants, had no respect for law or order.

"Send the youngster to school, or he will come to no good."

The words fell somewhat heavily on Polly's ear. They seemed an echo of the dismal prophecy hazarded years ago by old Jem. But the baronet was determined and somewhat prejudiced against the child. The fact that his reputed mother was not a native of the place, but had come from the neighbourhood of London, served to prejudice Sir George, who made no further inquiries about the boy.

And, though Polly had an unreasonable aversion to the school which had been endowed by a former inhabitant of the parish, in which boys and girls were educated gratis—with such severity that on one occasion a poor child was said to have hidden himself in a dry ditch, and to have remained there a couple of days, from fear of being cruelly whipped for playing truant—she had no adequate excuse for not obeying the magistrate.

And now came the dismal fulfilment of the prophecy, for as soon as little Jem went to school the evil part of his nature, which had before been kept in abeyance, came to the front in an amazing and alarming manner. It was perhaps somewhat hard on him that he should no longer have been allowed to tumble about, a dusty imp, amongst the rubbish-heaps near the cottages. It was hard to be made to learn when incapacity for teaching was too often seasoned by hard words and severer blows; but harder still, according to old Jem, that a child like that should be kept to lessons, when he might already be earning something, in days when the farm labourers had only eight or nine shillings a week. Every field had its huge hedgerow, with pollards for firing, which "Ile Jem" could gather—a proceeding at which most of the farmers winked, so long as the hurdles were not interfered with. So little Jem's schooling meant an absence of sticks for fuel, as well as an absence of the pennies which he had hitherto been accustomed proudly to bring home as a reward for his cleverness in turning somersaults.

Polly sent him with much protest. People were more strict with children then, and did not take the same kindly notice of them as they do now; also the language which they used to them was often cruel and profane. Polly Burton was aware of this when she insisted that she "could larn him herself, for all that such a little 'un need larn," and further declared that she "didn't hold to beating with a stick." Yet it was the stick

which was applied to the child's back, and that a little sharply, when, on the first day of his academical studies, he took a field-mouse in his pocket, bright-eyed and agile like himself, which raced round and round the room, to the consternation of the master. It was a bad beginning on both sides, and "Ile Jem," who was uncompromising in his dislikes, made up his small mind once and for all on the question of learning. It was not that actively or outwardly he rebelled, but his spirit rose against the bullying treatment, and he hated the very sight of a book.

He would be a truant, and take the consequences of it, and I am afraid that Polly and Jem Burton often connived at this wickedness ; for active of limb, frank and honest, and with a faculty for enjoying himself, little Jem was at least capable and ingenious. He had a hundred ways of making the best of it when he determined to absent himself from school, and in those days he could pick up enough to help the elder people. For the curriculum of gout and rheumatism, never likely to end in this world, had commenced for old Jem, and, as the years went on, in his readiness to help, the little fellow determined to brave the wrath of the schoolmaster and of Sir George himself, who every now and then appeared in the village, with a good many rings on his fingers, a plaid shawl about his shoulders when the weather was cold, and a habit of kicking small dogs which got in his path, and of pushing children out of his way with a stick. Polly's foundling used to stare at him with childish wonder in his big eyes. The man's face was not feeble, but it was conceited, and the lines of temper and discontent in it could hardly be concealed. The baronet prided himself on knowing the character of almost every one in the neighbourhood. He had set himself determinately to suppress mendicancy, and the child's saltatory tricks, as well as his cleverness in running away from school, seemed to merit reprobation.

The insidious disease, which had concealed itself so long in Polly Burton's constitution, made rapid inroads at last, and, though the boy had learnt little, it became necessary to keep him at home to help both herself and her father. But so ignorant was she, and so careless of new and somewhat necessary regulations, in her life which had glided by with little count of rules or days, that she was not aware of the infliction of a fine for truancy, which the magistrate, in his desire to make the people grow up virtuous and respectable, had determined to enforce as a matter of regularity. As to the legality, he cared not. No one was likely to interfere with his jurisdiction. He had called a committee to assist him, and the committee had determined on this course.

It was no secret to any of them that the child, which was sometimes called "Ile Jem," and sometimes "Little Nobody," had been found a greater pickle than the schoolmaster could manage; that, when he had been punished concerning the field-mouse, the boy had next provided himself with a hedgehog, and that often in summer-time he had been found wandering about with shoeless little feet, or sleeping on grounds in which he was trespassing, so that it had been necessary to shake him to get him awake. Such a case needed stern measures, the more so that the gentlemen were, one and all of them, by this time acquainted with Jem's history, which was no secret in the place.

Jem's mother had been a tramp, and the nomadic tendencies were doubtless inherited. For children of the criminal classes were supposed to enter into perdition by a natural title; the curse belonging to their parents was handed on to them.

Sir George really supposed that he was eminently self-denying in undertaking a nauseous task, when, on the return from one of his rides, he reined in his horse, and forced himself to speak to the little urchin, who had his tongue in his cheek in a manner which was certainly most abhorrent. It was a cold day, and the boy, who had been scantily fed—though he required as little for his wants as a sparrow, which could pick up a grain here and there—was looking thin and sharp-faced, whilst the colour in his usually fresh young cheeks had turned to violet edges from the keen air and want of nourishment.

"Tell your mother," said Sir George, "that she has a couple of shillings to pay on account of your ill-behaviour, as you have not been at school."

The boy vouchsafed no other answer than a rapid, somewhat significant glance. His tongue was still in his cheek—an irritating grimace. He bore more than one resemblance to the easily-satisfied sparrow. For, like it, he could be occasionally pert, though generally inoffensive. He did not believe in Mary Burton, who had no money to buy food, having to pay fines. It was not in his nature to fear, but he was a little inclined to laugh.

"The jackanapes is disrespectful," thought Sir George, as he glanced down at the impish figure of this ill-mannered child, who shuffled his feet, but made no attempt to doff his hat.

The waif must have known well enough, as the magistrate reflected, that every well-trained youngster was expected to pull the front lock of his tangled mane when he talked to his betters. All the people round cringed to the baronet, and Sir George could not possibly suspect that by some of the very people who cringed the most he was inwardly detested. He did not fly into a passion, but, with the conviction that any one

who gave the lad a thrashing would be doing a good work, he adroitly used the butt-end of his whip to dislodge the hat on the impudent young head, in spite of a mocking gesture made by the child. But it seemed as if an evil spirit of mischievous glee possessed the strange waif; for when Sir George, priding himself on his self-command, shouted, in a louder tone, "Tell her to pay it by next Monday," the boy shouted back, "She hasn't got it to pay."

And then, dodging about the while, he commenced shying tiny pebbles at the horse's legs, the smile curling the corners of his mouth as the animal began to rear.

It was the climax. Sir George, who was a powerful man, managed to soothe the horse, and then dismounted, holding the bridle with his right hand, while he grasped the boy as if he had been a puppy with his left, and, flinging him a couple of yards, began to slash him as if he were made of wood. Swish, swish, went the pitiless whip, curling round the lithe, uncovered, sunburnt legs of the little lad, but the pride in the child not only prevented him from crying out, but even, for the time, from feeling.

"I will teach you to throw stones, and to answer me like that—you ragamuffin—you beggar's brat!" cried the angry gentleman, with little idea of the rage and vengeance which he was rousing in the poor boy's heart.

It was only Mary Burton who could tell, from the cut clothing and from the wheals on the child's back, that which he purposely concealed from any one else; only she who could guess how the mind, just as it had begun to bud, was slowly withering and becoming fit for naught but bitterness.

"Oh, hush!" said the good woman, thoroughly affrighted at the clenching of the little fists and at the look of hatred which had been summoned with a dark frown on the young face, "you will make me think that I have *spoilt* you."

For already old Jem was shaking his head and reminding her how he had told her that the parent stock was bad, and that from an ill tree like that there could come naught but evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was as yet little of that precocious speculation and intellectual refining which has come in with the so-called "march of knowledge," and which may make it difficult to impress on the mind of the youngster of the future the danger of the violation of the Decalogue.

There was still a firm belief in the use of the rod, and it cannot be said that Sir George's conscience reproached him in the least when he felt that he had given an ill-taught brat the hiding which he deserved.

Had Polly Burton lived, the love might still have conquered the hate. But on one morning in the following spring, when the swallows were coming home, and when the scent of flowers was on the wind, Polly was found stiff and stark, with but little enough of bed and bedding. It could not be said that she had undergone more privations than others of her neighbours. But the winter again had been a hard one, and Polly had less constitution than others to stand it. Her simple funeral was obliged to be at the expense of the parish. It was fortunate for old Jem that he was becoming a little childish, and, when he was told that the kindly heart had ceased to beat, he comforted himself by repeating over and over, with the simplicity of a child, that she had "gone to glory," and that his "time," he thanked God, could not be long. He still never did anything by halves, and though he sang out of tune with his poor old cracked voice, he took especial pains with his singing, and piped with odd recollections of old melodies about "glory, glory," when the funeral was over, and he was left with no other companion than little Jem in the house.

He was beginning to be afraid of the waif whom his daughter had taken in contrary to his approval, and rather winced when he came in contact with the child's shrewd, sharp glances. But Polly had a truer mourner in the little desolate child, whose heart felt as if it would break under the burden which oppressed it.

Old Jem had a way of drowning his sorrows which Polly might not have allowed had she remained to take care of him. For, though the pothouses did not as yet outnumber the cottages, there was a convenient "public" near at hand where the farm-labourers and operatives could get their pint of beer. "It were a hoggish sort o' a place," as Jem the elder sometimes declared in a fit of confidence to a boon companion when he descanted on the greater glories of the metropolis. But brandy was fortunately little drunk in it, and almost as rare as nectar. The beer was so weak that it could not do the old man much harm, and some of the neighbours—pitiful at the sight of the wreck of such a grand physique—would "treat him" when "Ile Jem" was out of the way.

Meanwhile no one seemed to care what became of the child. He was left to pick up as he could a scanty means of livelihood from gathering the spring flowers, and tying them into bundles for sale. His little sunburnt figure, bare-footed, with keen face, was well known that spring to the visitors at Torringmoor.

For the child had sense enough to understand that if he did not do enough to turn honest pennies, old Jem would soon be left to collapse into something worse than what Carlyle called a "poor-law Bastille," and, though there was little enough love lost between the two, the boy had a dim sense that Polly would not like it, and, for the sake of what Polly had done for him, he was in duty bound to support her old father. The word "Polly" in those days comprised the whole of his religion; it was a sort of fetish to him and served to keep him straight.

"There's a deal of wickedness in this place," Polly Burton had said to him on the day before she died. And, for the sake of the woman who had acted to him as a mother, he would run away as fast as his little bare legs could carry him when he heard other mothers execrating their offsprings with volleys of curses up the street. He was thankful to think he had never had a real mother, if that was the way with them.

For Polly had spoken nothing but good words to him. She had left him her old Bible, but unfortunately he could not read it. And what pleased him since her death best was to get out, on the pretence of gathering flowers, to the loneliness and isolation of the desolate moor. To be there at sunrise, and to see the sun striking through the clouds and illuminating their dark edges, was always a pleasure to him, and a still greater pleasure to watch the great ball of fire throwing open the gates of heaven as it sank into rest. The mystery of interwoven foliage, and of subtle shining reflections in the pools, which suggested the neighbourhood of the river, did something also to comfort him and to speak with Polly's voice. But best of all was the time when it seemed to his untutored fancy as if invisible hands must be kindling the lights in those far-away mansions where his adopted mother had gone to dwell. He scarcely ventured to wait to wonder if, when this solemn hour came, she might be allowed to look down upon him and help him. For the darkness brought its task, and, hastily gathering together the bunches of wild-flowers which during the day he had failed to sell, he would make his way, under the merciful covering of the gloom, to the graveyard in which they had hastily buried Polly, with the grass not yet grown upon her grave.

The graveyard was supposed to be closed after sunset. But this could make no possible difference to the agile little figure, which crept along with stealthy steps, and prided itself on climbing every sort of fence. Not only was the wall no impediment, but the child had a sense of having the place to himself as soon as the stars came out. And evening after evening he brought his bunch of wild-flowers—primroses, violets, owslips, bluebells, or marsh marigolds, as the case might be—and piled them, as any little idolater might have heaped

his offerings before a shrine, on Polly's grave, pressing his own little face on the turfless mound, and watering some of the flowers with tears which no one in the world would have thought he could shed. For, after he had accomplished his pilgrimage, he would return moodily from the churchyard, scowling and getting out of the way whenever his fellow-creatures tried to draw near to him.

It was scarcely in human nature that this sort of thing should continue without any change, and, after a few weeks, it occurred to the lad that his adopted mother must be tired of always seeing the same flowers. He had seen ladies who were rich with magnificent floral wreaths made of azaleas and camellias ; for though as yet the Protestant feeling had decreed that it was rather an unsafe thing to take to praying over graves, lest by any chance one might be tempted to take to praying for, or even to, the souls of the departed, yet love overleaped such decrees in its eagerness to give its best.

He had heard a good deal about trespassing, but it never impressed him in the least. The farmers or the gentlemen round would have found it as easy to catch a hare as this swift little trespasser when it pleased him to exercise himself in his neighbours' estates. He was familiar with all their grounds, and though the committee, which in time was to give place to a "Town Council," had lately taken to putting up trespass-boards, "Ile Jem" could not read them, and so the trespass-boards made no difference.

Old Jem had once tried to impress upon his obtuseness that Sir George was a magistrate, and had added in his hearing :

"What was the use of going into Tarringmoor for magistrates—wasn't the gen'l'man as lived close to them one hisself, as well as the parson as cum on Sundays?"

I am very sorry to say that this warning effected a very different purpose from that which it was desired to accomplish, since the child's principal wish was to spite Sir George. It flashed upon him suddenly that in the garden at Rashleigh were some rare spring flowers, with the cultivation of which the gardener had taken especial pains. There were double narcissi and some beautiful waxy hyacinths. To pick the plants in the greenhouse would have seemed to "Little Nobody" to be a crime. His system of ethics was a strange one, but nothing would have surprised him more than to be told that to pick a flower which grew in the open air, and which seemed to belong to anyone, as much as the stars did to heaven, would have been looked upon by the magistrate as an act which obviously required punishment.

Evening after evening, after the brilliant idea occurred to him,

garlands of the golden-centred narcissus and of the creamy hyacinth appeared on Polly's grave. The depredator first of all took three or four, and combined them with the wild ones, but after a time he grew bolder. The gardener set somebody to watch, by the advice of his master, and the child was caught, with his hands full of the blossoms. Even old Jem had nothing to say for him, when he was told that the punishment would be a fine or else a term of imprisonment.

"Some of 'em holds to being conwarted," said the old man, over his cups that night at the "public." "I was never one o' that sort, but seems to me my Polly was allus conwarted. Now this chap comes of a bad lot. I all along sed as he'd go to the gallus."

It was ungrateful, to say the least of it, of old Jem. But the little sense which he once had was altogether deserting him. And it never occurred to him to think how he was to "get along" when the swift-footed little rascal could no longer run by the side of the carriages in Tarringmoor, holding out his bunches of wild flowers, and exchanging them for halfpence.

It seemed to the little fellow that soon everything would be punishable, when he was asked if he had seen the trespass-board, and read its directions. The comparatively small number of men and women who could read would have made most of them naturally frightened of undecipherable printed directions. But little Jem, who had not troubled himself about them at all, seemed to be only surly-tempered, and had no excuse to offer. He never thought of mentioning the sacred matter of Polly's grave, but had somehow an idea that the angels, of whom his adopted mother had so often talked, would be equal to the emergency, and would be sure to protect him—the more so that Polly had urged it upon him with her last breath to keep honest and true and never get into jail.

The child's silence made the matter worse. His case was considered to be one of contumacy. He somehow understood that the policeman to whose tender mercies the gardener immediately handed him was a functionary of the law, and, though he felt fairly crazed when he was taken, as a matter of course, to the lock-up for the night, he had sense enough to know that he could not resist the municipal authorities, though he was, as he had been often told, in a free country. He had meant no harm. But when his pockets were searched, and the policeman seemed to think the case looked terribly grave, because they contained a pocket-knife, two stones, and a ball of string, he felt more than ever an apathy of fear, which showed itself by grumpiness and silence. Cases, such as that of a man who had recently died in Whitecross prison for a debt of fifteen shillings, had been discussed before him, as well as that of another wretch

who, for stealing two odd shoes, had been sentenced to transportation for seven years. Old Jem did not hear the newspapers discussed at the public-house for nothing.

The child was literally stupefied by terror. On the following morning he was brought up to be examined before the magistrates, one of whom was a parson (and Polly Burton, who had taken her charge to the meeting-house, had failed in her duty by not taking him to church); another, who had a jerky, genial manner of speaking, but who looked properly shocked at the appearance of the little beggar, and finally, and worst of all, Sir George himself. That the form of examination was a farce, and that there was a "foregone conclusion," as the act was undeniable, was evident from the way in which the gardener, as witness, stated the case.

Little Jem had never before heard his character stated in plain terms. He opened his eyes wide in his accuser's face, and then literally gasped for breath. He began to forget his terror, and his natural shrewdness came to his assistance. There was an angry glitter in his blue eyes, and more than one of the gentlemen who were present could not help being struck by the shapeliness of his limbs and face, and by the fact that he carried himself erect as no cottage-bred lad ever carried himself, as he answered, saucily, "I am not a vagrant."

A friend nudged his elbow.

"Be wise, and hold your tongue, you young rascal," he whispered.

Little Jem looked round. There should have been many people to speak a good word for him, he thought; people who had known him since his babyhood, and could have said that he meant no harm to any one; but somehow or other they were not there. He was only aware of faces which looked stern and terrible, and he knew that all the evidence went to show that he had taken the flowers. His only hope seemed to be in speaking for himself, as, breathing hard, with face white and scared, but looking defiantly at his judges, he cried out, "I never begged from no one. I only sold my flowers."

It was an unlucky speech, as one of the bystanders laughed, and said, in a tone loud enough to be heard, "You sold what you had stolen, you young vagabond."

"The lad is a good lad," said a woman, kinder than the rest, and who stood up for his defence, since she, like Polly Burton, had a natural dislike to the Tarringmoor people, and prided herself on retaining more cockney speech. "You would not bracket him with thieves. A beggar in course he is, poor brat! but, saving your worship's pardon, I don't see how he can be anything else—coming, as he did, by a wrong tack into the world, and taken up by a weaksome, cranky creature, as always

lived more or less on charity. He's down enough in the mouth a'ready, without throwing o' it into his face."

"He is a vagrant—all the mischief comes of his vagrancy," said one of the magistrates severely.

"That will do, my good woman—you may step down," answered another. "We cannot allow uneducated people to pamper mendicancy."

There was no other attempt made at little Jem's defence. Certainly one neighbour, who wished to magnify his own importance, pretended afterwards, without an atom of truth, that "he knawed who did it; but o' course he warn't a-going to blab." "He'd heerd tell," afterwards said another, "that if folks only looked over a gate at a turnip-field, there'd be other folks ready to swear to a whole waggon-load of turnips against em."

In each case it was the rustic, as usual, shutting his eyes and ears, lest he should be caught and dragged in himself by some of the wheels and pulleys of this horrible machinery called the law. More than one man and woman had come into court intending to say a word respecting the ignorance of the waif and the fact, which had been guessed by them and confirmed by the sexton, that the flowers had been pulled in childishness for Polly Burton's grave. But each, when summoned to come forward, fell back like a coward on assumed stupidity, and slipped out of court.

Meanwhile, the examination, which had made the little fellow's head whirl, was quickly over, and he had to hear the sentence pronounced in this terrible judgment-chamber.

The gentleman who had the genial manner had asked him if he had anything to say for himself. But when the boy looked round and saw that the neighbours, who could have spoken in an ordinary way to his industry and readiness to oblige, were none of them there to help, he could only repeat doggedly that he did not know he might not allowed to pick a few of the flowers.

"Then it is time you knew *now*," said Sir George, who began to speak. And to little Jem, who listened, it somehow became plain that, because he had stolen the flowers, he might some day be guilty of any theft, arson, or murder, that the mischief was to be beaten out of him, and he was to have twelve days' confinement with hard labour.

When he heard the sentence, the pride which had hitherto kept him up broke down. He burst into a passion of angry tears, striking with his fists at the policeman who took him out of court.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was but a very unimportant event of everyday life in the neighbourhood of Tarringmoor. Old Jem had gone to the workhouse by the time that "Ile Jem" came out of prison. No one had thought of what would become of the lad, who was more than ever "Little Nobody," or "Mr. Nobody" now, as his companions, who wished to be witty, had called him. He had kept the title to himself as soon as he heard it, not knowing that it was already familiar to Polly Burton. Why should he be jeered at because he was ragged, and had hardly enough to eat?

When he went to look for old Jem, and found that he was gone, a fire of impotent rage consumed the boy, and seemed to tear at his vitals. It was not that the old man had been particularly kind to him, but he had looked upon him as a trust, and had promised Polly to "do" for him.

The child's life had required wonderfully little before the term of imprisonment which had branded him as a jail-bird. A little water, a little bread, a little straw or heather to sleep on, had sufficed for his daily wants. He had risen with the lark during Mary Burton's lifetime, and had been an active, bright-eyed creature, picking up enough for his daily wants in the fields.

But prison life had changed him more than ever, bringing him in contact with fresh people. He was conscious of new instincts which made him vow revenge, and which told him he could do something in the world some day. Had he been less clever, it might have fared better with him. His retentive memory was far worse for him than if he had had the power of covering his injuries with oblivion. He had not been long enough in confinement to become pallid or heavy-eyed—in fact, he had been fed better than usual; the prison diet was like feasting. It was not his body which had suffered, but his soul. At the expiration of the twelve days, there was not only a wild look in the poor boy's face, but all the self-respect had gone out of him. He hung his head with a sense of shame, as if he could no longer walk erect, and the sunlight, of which he had been so fond, seemed to dazzle him. But this was not the worst. It was not only that life seemed to be as much over for him as if the last planks had been nailed over his little body, but that deep down in his heart there slumbered a sullen dull instinct of revenge.

"Blast them!" he cried, though he had promised Polly he would not use bad language. "Blast him!" as he thought of the magistrate, with a sudden frenzy of impotent passion.

The woman who had tried to say a word for him was fairly

frightened into the belief that the child's wits had been scared "out o' him," as she met him coming away from the tumble-down cottage in which he had lived with old Jem. Her exclamation was afterwards that he was not only grumpy and glum, as if nothing would ever make him smile in this life again, but that he wandered in his speech, and seemed stupid—"nilly, willy," as she put it.

"I wish they'd 'ave killed me—it 'ud have been soon done wi'," he said, rubbing his fists into his eyes, in his determination not to disgrace his manhood of ten years old. And these were the only sensible words which she could get out of him.

As to Sir George—of whom the child had heard in prison that he only cared for one stratum of humanity, his own, and the rubbish which lay beneath it might be kicked at and trodden down—he had oddly determined to be equal with him, to make his way in the world, and by-and-by to defy him.

The boy was quick enough when he chose to learn, and he had proved an apt pupil at his new school, the prison. All pains were to be taken, all means to be justifiable by which tyrants could be met as equals. His ideas were perhaps a little confused, but he had almost an iron constitution. From his babyhood he had been used to bear cold, hunger, and thirst, to sleep anywhere and anyhow, to bend his body into all sorts of extraordinary positions, to lift heavy weights, and endure all sorts of privations. He intended to put his abilities to good use. He would emigrate, work hard, learn everything that he could, and come back with a fortune to defy his would-be masters.

There was a desperate fellow, who had been in Australia, now in the prison, and this man's stories, told at nights—in the days when the same precautions were not taken as they are now, and when the "non-imprisonment of children" was a question not even debated—had fired the little urchin's imagination. It is likely that these tales of adventure, under any circumstances, would not have left the boy's mind, and the drearier his life in —shire, the more he probably would have longed after these wild exploits of fabulous travel.

"You're not quite a fool," one of the man's fellow-prisoners had answered, "but that kind of talk is all my eye."

"Little Nobody" believed in it, and meant to prove it. Once, on the day after he came out of prison, he saw Sir George's carriage pass, the owner driving with his wife and child, and looking obtuse and self-complacent. He would probably have laughed heartily if he could have been informed that the small jail-bird had shaken his fist at the carriage until it vanished, that his little body had been contorted with rage, as if the boy were in a fit, that his strong white teeth had been ground together, and that he had tried to pull his once

lion-like mane as if he would drag it from the roots, and had been in a greater rage than ever when he found that the prison scissors had only left him short stubbly stuff to torture.

But the sight of the carriage had done something. It had intensified his resolution. More than ever he was determined that he would not stay in the town where he had been flogged and proved guilty of a punishable offence. The punishment which had been administered was shameful and degrading. Rather would he walk to his death, with suffocating heart and blistered feet. He had been used to long-continued hunger, and it was nothing to him to plod painfully over hill and dale. The walk to Bristol might be a long and painful one, and he would have to earn his bread upon the way. It was all the more painful now that he believed no more in Mary Burton's angels. If there were any such things as angels, why should they allow such things to be?

But, if the child did not believe in angels, he believed in endurance of suffering. One of the men in prison had told a tale of General Jackson—how, when he filled the post of president in the United States, he and his men could bear privations. It was quoted of him that once, when warring against the Indians, he perceived acorns, which were spread on the door of a hut in which they had taken refuge.

"Gentlemen," said Jackson, looking significantly at the acorns, "we have no reason to complain of want of food."

The story—true or not—had photographed itself indelibly on the memory of the boy, as he thought of the many miles of dusty road which lay before him, and which he should be forced, shoeless, to tread.

A little girl, who had loved him, and who had been accustomed to play with him in the days before Polly Burton's death, when love of solitude had not taken possession of the unhappy waif, watched for him from one of the cottages with large, liquid eyes, and offered him a crust of bread. But a better instance of the evil which maltreatment had already brought on his nature could not have been given than by the push which he gave his would-be helper, bringing the tears to her eyes, as he burst from her grasp. The poor, little, puckered, wobegone face controlled itself with an effort; for the child had the intuition of a woman, that "Ile Jem" would never have given her that surly push, if they had not been cruel to him.

The girl had belonged to the somewhat particular clique of people whom Polly Burton had liked to favour.

"Yew're glad yew've a-cum out—aren't yew now?" she said, twining her arms again about her friend. "Lord! who's to pay for yewer vittels and drink, if there's nobody as 'ill employ yew?" she added, with sharp precocity.

This was a difficulty which had not yet occurred to Jem. But, if he needed a further proof that the honest and independent peasantry would have as little as possible to do with prisons, he had it at that moment in the fact that a woman appeared at the door, calling sharply, and the girl, recognising her mother, turned immediately, and went in.

"And yet I niver knewed the law, and never i'tended to go 'gainst it—niver," thought the waif, trying to speak soberly to himself, since one of his resolutions—essential to the carrying out of his deeply-laid plan of vengeance—was not again to let his passion visibly get the mastery of him, and to learn to read that he might try to keep himself closely within enactments and statutes, whenever he was likely to be found out. Otherwise his hand was against every one, and every one's hand against him. He forgot all about Polly Burton and her precepts as he toiled, jaded, foot-sore, and heart-sick, for some weary miles, covered with dust or wet with rain. Once a kind woman, to whom he said that he was walking to Bristol, gave him a bit of supper and offered a barn for him to sleep in for the night. But oftener he had to lie down in the hay-fields, or by the side of a hedge, gathering wild-flowers to sell in the day-time, but no longer caring for the beauty of them. And, during these few days, there was one refrain chiming on in his heart :

"When I be grew'd a man, I'll back to pay 'im in 'is own coin."





Part II.

A man's a man for a' that.

BURNS.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT thirty-three years afterwards, on a bright March afternoon, a man, vigorous in figure, and with one of those picturesquely bearded faces which have become more common in England than they were earlier in the century, with a shaggy overgrowth of hair hiding much of the features, was driving in a hired carriage in the neighbourhood of Tarringmoor. This traveller had been borne, like other people, on the "tireless wings" of the spirit of steam past mine and waste and common, past gray rocks and green pastures, watered by shining rivers, to the now flourishing town of Tarringmoor, which not only boasted a railway station of its own, and had populous suburbs where once there had been fields and flowery lanes, but had even for more than thirty years been allowed to have a voice in the government of its country.

The express train which had been tearing away at a terrible speed on its south-westward journey, carrying passengers from London, did not astonish the new-comer, and though the Tarringmoor people were proud of the rapid growth of their town, in which the old landmarks seemed to have disappeared, he looked as if he thought it a sleepy sort of hole, compared, for instance, with such a place as Chicago.

Wherever he had spent the earlier portion of his life, the traveller had certainly been used to a world of change and progress, and, if he had anything to complain of in this "tight little island," it would have been that the people in it moved too slowly. But he did not, as a rule, reason about anything at all. He was not sufficiently educated to appreciate the intellectual development and social improvements which he took as

a matter of course, and would have looked puzzled if any philosopher or historian had suggested to him that the present age was one of the most wonderful in the history of the world—greater than the age of Augustus in Rome, of Leo X. in modern Italy, or of Louis XIV. in monarchical France, and possibly surpassing in our own country that Elizabethan era which is still to the majority of Englishmen a period the thought of which makes their heart glow with the enthusiasm of national exultation and pride.

Others might crack mental nuts of that sort. Reuben Sellwood, as he called himself, was more inclined to think that the old country was going to the dogs, and considered himself to be less of an Englishman than a cosmopolitan. He had picked up a sort of polyglot knowledge in his contact with adventurers of all nations. He prided himself on having little sentiment, and was not accustomed to render homage to grand old names, or to analyse high-sounding phrases. He cared less about the success of the age than his own personal success in it, and he would have cared little enough about that had he not looked upon it as a means to an end. He flattered himself that he was nearer to the accomplishment of that end than his wildest hopes had led him to expect, when—on landing but a short time before in England—he had seen the announcement for sale of a certain property called by its recent owner “Broadmeads”—a property which was advertised at an enormous price, and situated in close proximity to the estate known as “Rashleigh Park.” That park still existed, but it was an open secret that its owner was no longer the greatest landowner of the parishes of Tarringmoor and Waterdale.

Reuben Sellwood’s past history was in a secret drawer. No one knew the trick of it, or could touch the spring. And his own son could not possibly have guessed at the reason why he determined instantly on the purchase of “Broadmeads,” not even seeing the house and land before he closed with the bargain ; still less why it should have been a triumphant day for Reuben when the great mine-owner, who had made an almost fabulous fortune, and built for himself that which he intended to be a palatial residence which should outshine the glories of Rashleigh Park, had suddenly failed, owing to the rashness of his speculations, so that “Broadmeads” was put up for sale.

People have their idiosyncracies, and Reuben considered he had a right to his. He had never before talked seriously of residing for any length of time in England, though he had sent his only child to be educated in the Old Country. But then he had never spoken of his intentions or plans to anybody. And so impatient was he now to see the place which he had purchased

that, if the driver had not been sure of securing a heavy fare, he would have resented the way in which this gentleman with bronzed face, and beard which seemed to have been burnished by too much exposure to the sun, kept urging him forward.

In the opinion of the driver there was not much to look at in the old moor that March afternoon when, as the sunlight began to fade, the north wind got the advantage and began stinging their faces. And yet the stranger in the carriage, who had not seemed to take any notice when he passed through Tarringmoor, or passed people on the road who might observe his "queer ways," would every now and then start up and look about him, bending his neck as if he would almost dislocate it—a proceeding on which he certainly would not have ventured had he not looked upon the man on the box-seat as a mere machine, not likely to take heed of anything.

Reuben Sellwood was generally no admirer of landscapes. He might have observed grimly of them (in the same spirit in which he once observed of the sea that it "took too much room") that he had seen "too many of them." Mountain, vale, or wilderness were pretty much alike to him, and he would pretend that he was so utilitarian in his principles that factories and towns like busy ant-hills, with signs of man's determination to wrest gifts out of the hands of Nature, were the scenes which he most appreciated. No sound was so pleasant to him as that of the beating of Labour's heart. He liked to think that other men had spent their lives as he had in the stupid commonplace of getting on, and that few had conquered as he had done. This man had something *bourgeois* about the sharp expression of the little which could be seen of his face, the cut of his clothes and even the shape of his boots. Yet he had none of the joyous swagger of success which is generally to be found amongst the rich *bourgeois* class.

As the carriage turned a corner of the road, its occupants came in sight of a river, not flowing quietly, as in the gentlest days of summer, or churned into creamy foam, as it gurgled over brown stones, but full of water, which overflowed the big boulders—hiding the mosses, which could be seen on them when the water was lower, and overflowing even the meadows, as it came bounding with a joyous rush of white through the stony jaws of a little gorge.

The sight was a fair one, the more so as the afternoon sun was declining, and its faint rays seemed to fall in oblique lines over the moor, which, though it was not now aglow with furze and heather, had yet retained a richness of colouring from its peat-bogs and deep beds of withered bracken—the "red fern" of the ballad-writers. The reeds, the sedgy grass, the stunted oak-trees near the river, and the gray rocks in the distance

added to the beauty of the picture, and yet hardly accounted for the manner in which Reuben Sellwood drew a deep breath, and struck his sunburnt but well-shaped fist against the door of the carriage. Possibly he was interested in the surroundings of his new property.

I have said that he prided himself on not being romantic, but the bifold nature of the man—who, like most people, had not only a mixture of black and white qualities in his character, but in whom the shades were darker and the lights stronger than they are in the average man—might have been guessed by a cunning analyst of human nature.

The key-note of the moor was still its loneliness and desolation. Yet the traveller was scarcely likely to feel its ineradicable sadness. The weird impression of the little arrowy torrent dancing in the midst of the desolation, and of an old tree which had been hewn down perhaps some forty years before, but which, for some reason, had not been removed, so that the frost and rain of years had split its smooth-hewn surface, might have impressed a poet or an artist, but seemed to be little in keeping with Reuben Sellwood's matter-of-fact disposition. He had travelled hard all day, not waiting to break his fast; and though he had been used to far more fatiguing journeys, and could endure greater bodily hardships, he had possibly not counted on the exhaustion which might be produced by the excitement of purchasing his new possessions, and that such exhaustion might render it most difficult for him to maintain his usual unimpassioned self-control.

As he leant back in the carriage with a muttered exclamation, it might have been the drowsiness caused by the keen air and long-continued exertion which made it a little difficult for him to keep his reasoning powers on the stretch. And he, who was accustomed to boast of his contempt for dreamers, lapsed into a reverie which was strangely like a dream. He dreamed that in the old days, before the march of civilisation had swept them away, there had been wolves and red deer on this moor; that there had once been pixies, sometimes shaped like rolling balls of heather, and sometimes shrouded in gray cloud, and that he had heard a little child calling to them:

“ Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together,
Green jacket, red cap,
And gray cock's feather.”

The child's voice seemed to haunt him, as did an odd idea that where some cottages stood in rows there ought to be grand old oak-trees, remarkable for the strength and upward spring of their branches. What had become of the wood which seemed

as if it ought to stand where there were now blackberry branches trailing and old tree stumps? How came there to be a growth of rank grass on the open where he had dreamed of a picturesque road, with ruts made by the carts of wood-cutters, arched with overspreading branches, adorned with the richest foliage in summer, and enlivened by a joyous flood of bird-music in the young abundance of spring?

He—who prided himself on his want of imagination—had done his best to keep back these childish fancies, but they seemed to be born of his overwearied brain, just as mysterious forms, and what Mr. Ruskin would have called “spiritualising” mists, were born of this stream of water and the distant tors. He was ready to swear at himself as a fool, especially as the silly old doggerel about “Wee folk” kept jogging on in his head. And with it came another shadowy impression that some old woman had once told him about a pack of spectral hounds, whose cry was said sometimes to echo amongst the hollows of the hills.

The intellectual conception of anything spiritual—even of the humorous sort—had been for years utterly foreign to the man’s nature. But, owing to the causes which I have mentioned, a superstitious dread, which is often to be found in connection with scepticism—as if the circumscribed nature made its protest against being kept within the narrow bounds which condemn it never to look deeper than the mere material fact of its own life—was strangely gaining on him.

He was inclined to think his senses were fooling him, when suddenly, at the next turn of the road, he came upon a huntsman bespattered with mud, riding with impetuous speed. The apparition might have been an optical delusion, for all he knew to the contrary. For the driver—finding as soon as he had left Torringmoor that his new fare, so far from inviting confidence, was taciturn and a little abrupt—relapsing into sulky silence, did not appear to have seen the huntsman at all. The appearance was evidently a creation of Reuben’s own brain. Surely, if the rider had been what the metaphysicians call “objective” instead of “subjective,” he would have been leisurely returning in a common-sense way to his home, at an hour when a hunt—if it had taken place at all—must have been over. But that the huntsman should still be spurring on his tired mare, whose eyes were glittering, whose little ears were still erect, and nostrils still dilated, as if she and her rider had not had the glory, an hour or more before, of being “in at the death,” was a thing impossible. For the mare and her rider—evidently creatures of Reuben’s distempered brain—looked a

couple to go straight over hedges and ditches, when one after another of the lesser fry had ceased to follow.

These thoughts dimly shaped themselves in the traveller's mind as the huntsman came nearer, and with a complexion which was strangely white, in spite of the healthy red which was stamped, like the ruddiness of an apple, into his cheeks, dashed past the carriage, and disappeared at the turn of the road.

Reuben would have tried to think no more of the apparition, except that his health must for once need the care of one of those superfluous beings called doctors, had not the huntsman been followed, a few moments afterwards, by a boy, bare-headed, and running swiftly, with every appearance of agitation. The driver seemed to wake from the stupor into which he also had relapsed, owing to the snubbing which he had resented, and shouted to the boy, who, more communicative than the gentleman, held out a card with a pencilled message on it, as he gasped, short of breath :

"It is poor oud Sir George—he is terrible bad—a fit, or summut. Mr. Monckton be a-going for the doctor at Tarringmoor. But there's another as lives nearer, at Tewton, ye sees. I be hurryin' for he."

What was the matter with Reuben Sellwood? Was he, as he himself fancied, in that state from an overstrained nervous system, in which the taxed brain can bear no extra pressure? Why else should the perspiration break out in drops on his forehead, and the deep breaths which he had drawn once or twice when looking at the landscape become quicker and more laboured? Why should his own healthy colour fade even more perceptibly than that of Colin Monckton, who had been for several years the intimate friend of Sir George Rashleigh, and who might well reproach himself for allowing himself to be separated from the old gentleman—having been conscious as usual of the presence of neither friend nor foe from the moment that the first difficult line of fences rose stiff and straight before him that morning. It was all very natural for Mr. Monckton to feel it; but why should a stranger who prided himself on his want of sentiment have to make two or three ineffectual efforts to speak, and then ask in a quick, sharp tone, and in a voice which did not seem to belong to him :

"What was that?" he said, "an accident—a fit—somebody —injured—*who*?"

"He'll be a stranger to you—Sir George Rashleigh—any way," answered the man on the box-seat, slackening the speed of his horses, as he looked with his mouth wide open at the "foreigneering" gentleman, who for the first time seemed to take a real interest in anything.

"Stranger! yes, I believe you," repeated the new-comer—who was afterwards described by the flyman as a "queer customer"—bursting into a peal of harsh, unnatural laughter.

"'Tis naught to laugh at, as I sees—anyhow, he be a-dyin,——" muttered the honest fellow, eyeing Reuben Sellwood with something of the same expression with which the pilot's boy might have looked at the Ancient Mariner.

"Attend to your horses. I laughed at something connected with my own affairs," answered Reuben, angrily, as he resumed his usual harsh, arbitrary manner.

And the man, a little ashamed of his own uncharitable fancy that there had been something wicked-looking in the expression of the face of the unknown gentleman, drove on as he was desired.

CHAPTER II.

REUBEN afterwards heard what the flyman had failed to tell him—how that morning the rustics near Rashleigh Park had been all agape as an army of gentlefolk had invaded the village, streaming from all directions, most of the ladies gaily dressed and in barouches and pony-carriages, and some of the more enterprising damsels mounted on horseback.

In other words, the placidity of Rashleigh had been disturbed by a meet, and Sir George's pack, which had no right to be kept up considering the impecuniosity of its owner, was said to be in "unusually good form" as it sped away in the eastward direction. Tarringmoor lay to the west, and had other excitements of its own, its more enterprising inhabitants looking down on the hobnailed Cincinnati who were too willing to desert their ploughs to follow the cry of the hounds, and to admire the costumes of the hunters. But, had Reuben Sellwood cared to enter into conversation with the Tarringmoor people that morning, he would have heard many remarks of disapproval, and seen many shaking their heads at the rashness of Sir George, who, in spite of repeated warnings in the way of a broken collar-bone on one occasion and fractured ribs on another, had yet persisted in ignoring the advance of age, which rendered feats easy of accomplishment when he was younger, absolutely impracticable for him now. And it was well known

that it required no little quickness of eye and skill in horsemanship, to follow hounds over the morasses and rock-strewn hills.

A moraliser, fond of dealing in commonplace platitudes, could have drawn a good picture of the uncertainty of human pleasures from a contrast between the neighbourhood of Rashleigh Park that morning and evening. In the morning there had been a bewildering vision of carriages filled with bright, expectant faces ; groups of men in picturesque costume talking eagerly together ; and the villagers had been delighted by the sound of the huntsman's horn, the crack of whips, and the yelp of the dogs, with the blue sky above, in the fresh, invigorating air. Now the temporary excitement was over, the merry party of people who had met together that morning having dispersed under the influence of the bad news which threw a gloom over everything. No one had been with Sir George when the accident took place. He had seemed to lack his usual energy, falling behind the others, as soon as the hounds were on the scent. Some surmised that he had had a fit, others that he had been thrown in carelessly attempting to take a fence which presented no such difficulties as to account for the catastrophe. Anyhow he had been found lying senseless on the grass, with his horse standing by looking as sympathetic as a human being. His friends were so startled at his appearance when they lifted him up, that they thought it better not to risk the jolting of a carriage, and therefore a litter had been hastily improvised, and four stalwart men were now carrying him to Rashleigh Hall. The pony-carriages with their fair drivers had long since disappeared. Only one or two sturdy horsemen lingered about the park gates to see if they "could be of any use." But all thoughts of selfish amusement, with all chatter and commonplace talk, had ceased long before.

The driver of Reuben Sellwood's carriage had again to slacken the speed of his horses to save being brought in contact with the last remnant of the tag-rag-and-bobtail which—attracted by the new excitement—still followed the mournful procession at a respectful distance.

The owner of Broadmeads had conquered his transient excitement, and leant back on the cushioned seat of the carriage with a look of passionless indifference almost amounting to boredom, as if nothing disturbed him but the slight delay which almost amounted to annoyance. Had he been a few minutes earlier, he would not have been able to help seeing the litter carried into Rashleigh, with the figure on it, looking gaunt in the evening light, though the face had been carefully covered up.

Reuben was on his guard as he gave a passing glance at the little crowd near the park, and muttered, as if to himself :

"Well, if report speaks true, he was not in all respects such a neighbour as one would desire—still I am sorry it should have come to this."

It was the strangest return to the place he had bought.

"A bad omen," the servants said, who were standing in the hall of Broadmeads to meet the new master. He told himself that it was scarcely surprising he should be dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe; and certainly, as he drove in through the splendid iron gates—in themselves supposed to be a culmination of artistic skill, and on which his predecessor had lavished a fabulous sum of money—he scarcely noticed their magnificence, nor the beauty of a new plantation in which trees of every variety, from the deodora to the Wellingtonia, had taken root and seemed to flourish.

His coldness of demeanour was more studied than usual as he walked through the entrance-hall to the dining-room, and informed the man whom he had engaged as butler that he wished to be alone, and would require nothing but a few biscuits and some brandy and water till he rang for him.

Reuben Sellwood was a temperate man: his temperance had stood him in good stead at certain crises in his life when it had enabled him to triumph over others who were less temperate. But on this occasion he helped himself to the brandy more than once, though—in spite of his long fast—his appetite had disappeared. He did not ring for some time, exhausted though he was from want of food. He would not have been able to give an account of the strange, conflicting emotions which struggled within him, but these emotions made him desire to keep by himself. He was so accustomed to keep a strict watch over himself, and if possible to betray no feeling to his fellow-men, and so conscious that the storm which was convulsing his inner man, and which was making his eyes burn and his strong frame tremble in spite of himself, might betray itself in the tones of his voice or in some passing glance, that he required a little time to recover his habitual reserve.

His wit was too rude, his intelligence too uncultivated to enable him to analyse these emotions. But now that he was alone, it was no longer necessary to hide the swift changes of disappointment, vexation, rage, and pity which passed over that usually impassive portion of his face which he had been unable to veil from his fellow-men. He rose once or twice and walked rapidly up and down the room, murmuring something between his set teeth, and even bursting into another fit of the rather horrible merriment which had so disturbed the Tarringmoor driver, and which made it seem as if for some unaccountable reason the hate and exultation in his heart had been shaken into discordant laughter.

CHAPTER III.

REUBEN SELLWOOD had scarcely noticed the place, which he had been so eager to purchase, in the shades of evening. He had to wait for the next morning to experience his just keenness of disappointment in the fact that—seen by daylight—the mansion, which was partly modern Gothic and partly Jacobian, presented too much of that mixture of styles, that aiming at the combination of inconsistent novelties, which often proves the pitfall for the taste of a self-made Englishman.

The ivory, the purple, and the cedar had been brought from different climates as for Solomon, but Reuben had heard enough of the ways of the aristocracy to see at a glance that the finishing touch of some well-educated man, or high-bred lady was painfully needed, and there was that in Reuben's temperament, though he was by no means free from vulgarity, which made him wince a little as he recognised the want. If there had been a receipt for withering the furniture a little, making it look properly old, with the faded lovelinesses which Reuben had some dim idea would be natural in great people's houses, he might have liked it a little better. But there was nothing in this house stately with age, and the large gilded mirrors and velvet pile carpets reminded him too much of the great hotels with which he was already familiar.

He was not happy in the house, shutting himself up as much as possible, though the Tarringmoor people were ready, as he had expected, to bow before his wealth. He only scorned them for it, and took little interest in any of the cards which were left by the neighbours, concerning himself about none of them but the owner of Rashleigh Hall.

It seemed a little odd that a man who cared so little about his neighbours should trouble himself to inquire constantly about the old patrician who lay dying in the neighbouring hall, and that he should appear to take more than a little interest in the details of the painful bodily suffering caused by those injuries to the spine which were expected by slow degrees to prove fatal. He listened apparently with half an ear to the story of how the son, the future Sir Ralph, who led a retired life, had not been the only son, but had had a twin brother who, being by about half-an-hour the elder, would have inherited the title had he lived to do so.

"But that wur the queer part of the story, as I allus ses," continued the gossiping housekeeper, "they do say as that

lad Richard, as they called 'im, was quite different from the rest of 'em, and as how he turned up his nose at what he called shabby gentility when he wur quite a youngster. There was no sich thing as contradicting 'im, but he sets out by hisself to some place among the savages to build the family fortunes, as he puts it. Well, he marries an' all on his own hook, like, and ses as he hates all hartificial ways of living—all shams, as he calls 'em—that his sons shall learn to plough and his daughters to milk the cows, and all of 'em to live on together in a sort o' Hirish Eden. Then you see, as a body with a bit o' sense might ha' known all along, he died of a fever, and his gentle lady o' pining. And back comes all by herself the most managin' little maid, the last left o' the family."

"And what became of the child after she returned from New Zealand?"

"Well, it wur just for all the world like a fairy tale. Home she comes with roses from the sea-air on her cheeks, and box packed with shells, and seaweed, and feathers, and sich things—and some money, which they do say the old gen'lman wasted. But the comfort as she wur—that little un with her bright ways, and such a managin' head on her shoulders. For hafter the death o' his mother it's Mr. Ralph who gets married to a furrin lady as was allus a grumblin' when she found how poor the family was. Then she would lie with her black eyes a-starin', and little Miss Vere a-tending of her, and she a-dwindling away, accustomed all her life to company. And what company could she git? For what comfort," suggested chatty Mrs. Rose, who was glad to gossip about anything to which her taciturn bachelor master would listen, "could all they horsey gen'lmen be to she?"

Reuben tried to hide his inquisitiveness. It was no news to him that Ralph had married a foreign countess, and that that lady had brought no money to replenish the family coffers already exhausted by the extravagance of his grandfather and likely to suffer further still—in spite of Sir George's pretences at economy in other things—on account of his father's mad propensity for hunting. But the story of the elder brother who—directly he had discovered that his chances of doing anything he wanted were likely to be ruined by money difficulties in England—had shown such a strength of will in setting out to do the best for himself and for others, was as interesting as that of the little girl who, with temper unsoured after the death of her parents, seemed to have taken up her father's work, and let her daily thought be for the people she lived with. It was easy to guess that the bare notion of emigration would have been distasteful to the retiring and scholarly habits of Mr. Ralph.

"He wur allus one to sit at home, heven when his lady wur taken from 'im, though they do say as Miss Vere wur a born sick-nurse, and that though she wur but ten year old it wur pretty to see how she took the charge o' that new baby. And I often ses," continued the good soul, "how if Mr. Ralph's wife had lived, or the dowager leddy either, old Sir George 'ud never ha' been let ride when he had ought to have been sittin' comferble-like in his arm-chair, let alone the fac' that he had a letter given to him the mornin' of the 'unt—a business letter, as they ses, which was disturbin'-like; but there, God A'mighty on'y knows whether he was took with a kin' of fit, or whether, when the hoss tries to jump and jerks him a bit, he jes' tumbles off cos as how he could not sit—leastways, he'll never be the same again, and it is agonies as they ses he suffers in his poor old back."

Reuben Sellwood made no remark. He was taciturn as usual. But he shifted his chair, and sat with his head bent down, and his back to the light, as Mrs. Rose, who loved nothing so well as to spin a yarn of her own, however unsympathetic might be her listener, continued rapidly, as if she was afraid her communication might be interrupted.

"And most misfortunate is the famely, sir, for Sir Ralph as'll soon be—with the poor old gen'l'man having, so to speak, both feet in the grave a'ready—is not much above furty, and beggin' yer pardin', lookin' older than yerself, sir—for not only did he love his leddy, but his heir as should be is a bit of a gell, and no such right to what is left as Miss Vere as wur the elder brother's child. There be a matter o' ten years, as I ses afore, atween the two. They du say as the eldest is like a mother to the leetle un—bless both their pretty faces. A nice little black-eyed gell, a bit like her furrin mother, that little un—and yet she 'minds me o' un as I buried nigh her age. And her father as weighted with the old gen'l'man's debts, as well as his grandfather's that went afore—and all that by Mr. Richard's plans—the crushingest disappointment. No wonder as Mr. Ralph's a bit snarlish-like, he 'ad enuff to worrit him if ever a livin' man 'ad—for both the old gentleman and the one afore him in their ways as ye understand—the one a sort o' screw 'bout everything but horses, and the other," here, to fill up a rhetorical pause, Mrs. Rose held up both her hands, "they were both *that* extravagant—the un with his rowdy ways, and t'other as allus said he weren't extravagant neither."

"There, that will do, my good woman," said her master, in a deep voice which came from him so suddenly and so sharply that, as Mrs. Rose afterwards explained to those whom she called her "busom friends," it "went through her like a dart, and turned her blood all to cuds-like." "That will do," said

Reuben, with quite unnecessary sternness. "Remember that the one thing I can never forgive in a cook is unpunctuality. Let everything be properly done, and spare no expense to do it; but bear in mind that I do not wish to hear anything about it."

Mrs. Rose curtsayed and went away muttering, yet a little mollified by the judicious clause "spare no expense," which justified her in ordering a new black silk dress, and a dress cap which she had long coveted, though, as she explained to her confidants, her new master was "a hodd one."

"A letter,"—he received a letter that morning—"I wonder if it was a lawyer's letter," thought the new-comer, who, without any conceivable cause grumbled at all the dishes which were served to him that day, and told Mrs. Rose to dismiss the cook, though he had hitherto appeared not to have a fastidious appetite. An outsider might have said that the rich man was troubled, ashamed in a way which he could scarcely explain, ready to hate himself and everything about him, and to loathe the new house which he had purchased with his savings, if he could have seen him with his head resting on his arms for hours together, deep in thought, during that day.

Naturally enough the tragic catastrophe which had happened to the great man of the neighbourhood, whose impoverished fortunes had often before furnished a subject for conversation, was the principal theme of talk in the mouths of the few visitors to whom Reuben could not well refuse admission.

"A more melancholy state of things it would be scarcely possible to picture to yourself," said one of the Tarringmoor manufacturers who volunteered his information to the owner of Broadmeads—Reuben being too downright to excuse himself by the fashionable lady's fib of "not at home," and having no excuse for refusing to see a man who sent in his card that he was a bachelor, and would like to make his acquaintance. "One might think that a curse had alighted on the family, though it is one of the oldest ones in —shire. You see, the father and grandfather of the man who will soon have the title were both equally selfish. The former fellow was decidedly the *most* extravagant, but, though Sir George knew how things were going, he was such a dab at fox-hunting, and liked to keep up the name for taking the lead in that sort of thing in this part of the county, that there is no doubt he launched out too much in that direction, whilst he was pretending to curtail in another. They do say," he added, dropping his voice, "that the property is heavily mortgaged, and that much of it will belong to Sir Ralph only in appearance. Sooner or later it must pass into other hands—there is some mystery about the mortgagee—these things generally pass into the hands of several people—but they do say——"

An acute observer might have seen a glance keen as steel dart from the dark blue eyes of Reuben Sellwood, as a change of some sort, like a ripple caused by a sudden gust on ordinary impassive water, passed over his face, and, seeming to deprecate further information, he held up his hand as if to impose that reticence which he was known to practise habitually himself.

The Tarringmoor manufacturer was not an acute observer, and did not notice how Reuben managed again to bring up the subject which he appeared to have dropped, though he seemed as usual to be lending only half an ear to the chatter of his guest.

"Hard lines for the future Sir Ralph," remarked Reuben, with a yawn. The manufacturer afterwards said to his wife that he was a "rough sort of customer," and had not learnt manners in being battered about the world. To the rich man he answered, politely :

"Yes, a laborious sort of fellow—does his best under the circumstances, but proud—proud as Lucifer ; just the sort of man to make an excuse for shutting up his place, and living quietly abroad, because he can't meet the expenses. A vast improvement on poor Sir George, who didn't manage to keep out of scrapes himself, though he was a blustering sort of magistrate, and hard enough on the peccadilloes of the poorer folk whom he had to deal with. When Sir Ralph comes into what they call the property, he will find that one half already has taken to itself wings, and the other half is hypothetical. Most of it is mortgaged, and the curious part of it is that they say there are not many creditors, but that the whole is likely to pass to one man, and he a foreigner."

"Warranted to go on like a barrel-organ for hours," thought Reuben, whom nothing irritated like small talk. Yet a refrain of the barrel-organ rang in his ears, and even haunted him in his dreams that night. "One might almost think there was a curse on the family."

The attitude of the cynical new-comer during the next few weeks hardly seemed to justify him in trying to usurp for himself the character of a Diogenes, or even to allow him to class himself with that half of the world which, according to the celebrated saying of Talleyrand, rejoices at the misfortunes of its neighbours. That the owner of Rashleigh Park was writhing day after day in sufferings which medical skill was almost powerless to alleviate, seemed to affect him in a singular way, as if he could give little attention to anything else.

In accordance with the directions which he had given to Mrs. Rose, gardeners—chipping, chopping, planting fresh flowers, and mowing the beautiful lawns—were busy day after day in

the gardens of Broadmeads. But though spring was coming in, with its golden daffodils, its white narcissi in the gardens, its little pink-headed daisies and its yellow and blue heartsease, and though the simple-hearted people in the neighbourhood could enjoy themselves in their little plots of ground—the poorer sort sending their little ones into the green fields to gather the pale cuckoo-flower and bells of blue hyacinth with the yellow primrose and golden kingcup—a heavy weight seemed to lie upon the heart of the man who, avowedly by his own exertions, had been able to beautify his life with such surroundings as few can enjoy. One might have said that the motive which had made exertion pleasant to him, and the fruits of exertion worth coveting, had been suddenly withdrawn.

Reuben Sellwood still kept up the mask in the presence of others. But, when he was alone, he lapsed into the dulness of languor. The poor peasant in the neighbourhood of Tarringmoor, invited that spring by the Divine Master to a feast of beauties which is our earnest in this life of greater and higher delights, was happier than Reuben. Nature's ritual, with its odorous breezes, its blended tints, and its rush of harmonious sound, did absolutely nothing to satisfy him; the feast was spread in vain. He sat alone, and no one could guess that he was secretly troubled by the thought of the poor, disappointed, heart-broken old man who was dying slowly in protracted agonies in a neighbouring mansion. He would not admit that the matter was of any consequence to him, who had prided himself on the fact that his heart had been shut for years to the grievances of any of his fellow-creatures. Possibly it was, because he was unused to most of the recreations with which others are accustomed to beguile their leisure, that this event which, if he had heard of it at a distance, would have seemed to be nothing to him, had the power to disturb his peace when he realised it in detail.

CHAPTER IV.

THOUGH, after a time, Reuben Sellwood had judiciously determined not to draw attention to himself by appearing to be too much of an anchorite, and refusing to see the people who called on him from Tarringmoor, it could not fail to be a matter of

remark that those who had speech with the new-comer knew no more about him than if they had abstained from seeking his acquaintance.

Had he wife and family, as most respectable men were supposed to have? Did he hail from America or Australia, and had he made his money in trade? It was remarkable that no one dared to put these questions point-blank. Many had beaten about the bush, and one enterprising lady from Tarringmoor, more daring than the rest, had ventured upon a sort of prefatory catechism, only to discover that the "enigma"—as Mr. Sellwood began to be nicknamed—however deficient he might be in other sciences, was a scientific adept in the art of verbal fencing.

One thing was certain, that the "enigma" made no pretence to be other than a self-made man. Yet it could not fail to be noticed that, though he was ready enough to announce this fact, he never told a single anecdote of his earlier life, and parried all inquiries with a reticence which he practised to such an extent that the gossips decided with a sigh of despair that even his nationality seemed to be a point which must be kept shrouded in uncertainty. He called himself a "cosmopolitan," an explanation which they were fain to accept.

"Even supposing he is an American," remarked one pompous man, deigning to explain for the benefit of the weaker sex, "you see, it would not make him a foreigner, for the English-speaking folk, wherever they dwell, and under whatever government, must be still our people."

The name "Reuben" was felt to be misleading. The man was fair, and had not the unmistakable physiognomy to be seen now in flesh and blood, little altered since it was carved on the stones of Nineveh. The men of Tarringmoor shook their heads, and again explained to the women, who were inclined to invent a romance like that of the Rothschilds :

"The fellow is no great commercial prince, no Haroun-al-Raschid, and no great Hebrew financier either, however he may have chosen to adopt a Jewish name."

So the tongues wagged for a little while, and then found they had nothing further to wag about.

Little difficulty was made about admitting the rich man to the club at Tarringmoor, although that club—like most in provincial towns—had prided itself on its narrow exclusiveness, apparently because no name had yet been enrolled upon its list which was of any consequence to the world at large. It was difficult for any one not amongst the initiated to steer its social course so as to keep out of all the little eddies and currents of prejudices, conservative respectabilities, and sectarian shibboleths which a new-comer could by no means afford to defy.

But Reuben Sellwood did not defy them ; he simply ignored them. And, unpolished as was his address, he had talents of his own which marked him out from the common ruck. Business men who made his acquaintance soon discovered that he had an aptitude for mechanical invention, and was able instantly to suggest some small improvements in the machinery they employed, which proved lucrative in the long run, and made them wonder less that he himself should have been able in the course of years to amass a not inconsiderable fortune.

"They do these things better than we do in America," was once more tentatively said.

"So I have heard," answered the man, who was never off his guard, and who was careful never to let slip words which should betray his familiarity with the newer as well as the older side of the ocean, although he was continually and almost unconsciously making comparisons. These comparisons were not altogether to the credit of the provincial people, who, with a narrow and unjust heedlessness of the opinions of other nations, were nursing their little prejudices and their insular pride in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, which seemed stirring enough to them, but to which, as Reuben scornfully thought, they could retire like lobsters who had cast their shells and were afraid of being rubbed by too active contact with their more enterprising fellows.

Power is sweet, and flattery not unacceptable to most of us. Reuben had always looked forward to enjoying it, and was not philosopher enough to understand the sudden sense of satiety and reaction, already making the fruit taste bitter which he had left so long to ripen.

The man, as his new acquaintances reasoned, had probably gone through much, and been moulded by many experiences. He held his head erect, and looked, they said, as if his hair, as well as his complexion, had been subjected to the scorching processes of a tropical sun, whilst his broad chest and powerful physique seemed to tell the tale of his having been braced by more than ordinary exposure and fatigue. His words were energetic and definite, but generally few. They went, said the more sentimental of the Tarringmoor folk, like rifle-shot, straight to the mark. He disliked what he called hollow babble, and did not mince his speech. "Poltroons, idiots !" he muttered more than once to himself, as he winced at what he called their "hollow babble." And yet he smiled rather grimly to himself when he found that other men deferred, not only to his wealth, but to a capability which was new to them, and consequently rather startling. He owed, as he felt, nothing to any one, and was scarcely aware how he in his turn had begun to look down on all the little fry of butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers,

being tyrannical in his dealings with them, and never brooking interference from any one beneath him. From a habit of watching affairs with an amount of keenness which approximated to genius, he had become accustomed to consider his own power as omnipotent, and those who sought his advice found him skilled in the secret of screwing down to the lowest the wages of the most competent workmen, with a decision of will and toughness of heart which had hitherto been unprecedented at Tarringmoor.

It was an ill compliment to that class which is accustomed to be called the higher one, that this tendency to injustice to those beneath him, and also a certain contemptuous inclination to keep aloof from those aspiring citizens who had just cast the chrysalis of the shop, and had retired in the newly-acquired butterfly state to gorgeous suburban villas, should have been taken as a sort of indication that a strain of nobler blood, possibly communicated to him from some remote ancestor, ran in the veins of the owner of Broadmeads.

"I don't pretend to know all the ins and outs of my family," answered Reuben, with ready *aplomb*, when some fresh adventuress, credited, according to the old tradition, with the curiosity of Eve, remarked graciously on the probability of Mr. Sellwood belonging to that branch of the family of Sellwoods which was well known in Dorsetshire. "Madam, I was not aware that there were any Sellwoods in Dorsetshire."

His voice sounded so very determined and defiant, and the look of severity, coupled with keen observation, which formed the main characteristic of Mr. Sellwood's face, was so terrific that the good lady forgot to detect the owner of Broadmeads in his first unwise admission.

Reuben was himself aware of the "slip," and chafed over it in secret. It worried him nearly as much as the weary feeling which he had had lately, as if the principal concern in his life was over, had worried him lately.

Meanwhile the crisis of the tragedy was fast approaching at Rashleigh Hall.

On a night towards the close of April, a group of figures was gathered round the bed on which the form, which looked a little more gaunt and tall, had been lying since the beginning of the illness. Sir George had not asked any questions, or seemed to take much notice of anything which had passed since his accident. But now the waking-up of the intelligence, which the doctors had prophesied would come before the end, warned the watchers that that end was nearer than they had expected. And as the sufferer began to toss about, clutching at the counterpane, he muttered for the first time articulate sounds.

His son bent down to catch the words, and started as he heard that the revelations which had been dimly hinted at were all too true, "Could not help it—it was the debts; could not pay the money—*all the estates.*"

CHAPTER V.

REUBEN SELLWOOD was reputed to love no one, but the world was wrong in so judging. He had a soft place in his heart for his only son. He would have increased his reputation for cynicism if he could have told how—in being battered about in different countries, and coming into contact with much of that evil which is so difficult to disentangle from the remnants of good—his experience of women had been unfortunate. He had been shaken out of all his finer theories about the sex, and, as soon as he became a victim to that devastating doubt which will sometimes make itself felt in morals, as well as in mental difficulties, he was wont to say :

"Some of them may be angels, but the larger proportion are—not to use a stronger word—wretched hypocrites. You can't trust 'em, and it is no use to make companions of 'em."

And yet he had married, when fortune began to smile upon him—a girl who was supposed to be somewhat above him in birth. He had no intention of making a friend of her, or of trying to sheath his own rough nature in the softer tissues of hers, but he liked her to be dressed luxuriously, and always to drive in a carriage, and he would boast that she had quite an "Eastern" love of luxury. So far from not humouring her extravagance, he would talk largely of that extravagance as of something "Oriental," which reflected a sort of glamour upon him.

In this sort of talk he showed his weakness, but in most respects his tact helped him to avoid any solecisms in manners. Whether or not, as the theory was, he had educated himself, he was certainly fairly well educated. Probably it was owing to a habit of reading Shakespeare in his leisure hours that—except for an occasional expression, which, as he was always on his guard, he seldom let slip before strangers—his style in English was far from bad. Better in some cases in its terseness and

even in its abruptness, than the style of others who had received a more classical education,—had it not been for the lapses in grammar.

The wife died ; she was kept for a few years like a canary in a cage which was supplied with plenty of seed, cake, and groundsel. She was expected to chirp and not to cry, but possibly she pined, as canaries are apt to do, for a little human love, or the companionship of her mate.

The boy was delicate like herself. He resembled his mother in his fairness of complexion and his delicately-cut features, and he had blue eyes, like his father's. His hands were a trifle too white and effeminate in size, possibly it was hard manual labour which had made the father's grow large and bony.

Reuben had not shown his usual severity to this child, possibly because he had lost two others, who died in infancy. The boy had been remarkable before he left school, for a dreamy look in his face—"visionary" some people called it. He had been apt to wander about for hours by himself, and his father—concluding somewhat disdainfully of the lad that he would be like his mother in "building air-castles and not realities," and in taking sickly imaginings for reasoning power—had nicknamed him, with tender condescension, his "poet."

"Poets must not work, they must have others to give them everything," he would say, as he loaded the child with pocket-money.

This fair-haired, gentle-looking boy was his only toy in the earlier days when, though he had some capital at his command, he had not achieved his present success. He liked to be seen in public with the lad, as if he knew that the juxtaposition was picturesque. He sent him to England before he returned to the Old Country himself, that he might be educated at Eton and afterwards at Oxford. He was almost sorry when Godfrey—as the boy had been called, to gratify a fancy of the mother's—had grown hardier in the course of years so as to lose something of the look of exceeding refinement which the practised eye of a medical man would have recognised as the sign of a state of delicate health.

It was now seven or eight years since Godfrey had begun to think, and had understood that little was known respecting his father's antecedents.

"Don't trouble yourself with what does not concern you," Reuben had answered, a little sternly, when the lad asked a few questions. "You worry yourself with fancies. It is too early yet. You will have time for all that nonsense when, at the University, you take up that humbug called metaphysics."

He seldom reproved his son, and, though he privately des-

pised all his youthful enthusiasms, he yet abstained from throwing cold water on them. Nonsensical aspirations were to be excused in "poets." And though this was a nickname which Godfrey would willingly have forgotten, and his father could have adopted no better method to deter the lad from writing a line of verse, yet there was something in his character—which tallied with his frail physique, and which seemed to be shadowed by the memories of his mother's long-continued sickness, and his own early life—which gave a satiric sting to the title.

Reuben put a tolerably high price on this article of his own "turning out."

"I have spared no expense to make him what he is," he would say to himself of his elegant son, whom he believed to be a thoroughbred product of this highly-strung modern civilisation. "I cannot talk their language," he would think to himself. "There is something which one feels but cannot articulate. But he—he has been brought up to it—he can chatter all their jargon. It is he who shall right me and show that he can hold his own amongst people of any rank. They shall bow down to him. He shall claim a share in their great memories."

He tried to repeat this cherished idea to himself on the morning of the day when Sir George's funeral passed a road leading to the little churchyard which could be seen from the windows of the house at Broadmeads. It was a windy day with showers of rain, and the *cortège*, swelled by many of the carriages of the gentry in the neighbourhood, had to contend with stormy gusts which threatened to blow over the hearse with long black plumes, which the protests of Dickens and other writers had not yet rendered obsolete. Reuben, who stood at the window which overlooked the road, shuddered and turned away as he thought for the hundredth time of that lawyer's letter, and wondered whether without its intervention that man in his old age would have been doomed to a wretched death. Somehow, the bloom had been rubbed off his triumph. It was in vain to puzzle out the causes of his failure. But, as he turned away from looking at the funeral, the turmoil in his mind went on as badly as ever. And Reuben wondered if he was growing superstitious as he felt himself strangely sore at heart and bruised, since if he had just been freed from the assault of visible evil spirits.

A few days afterwards Sir Ralph was closeted with the family lawyer, and heard for the first time the full extent of the disaster which was a part of his inheritance. That the estate had already dwindled to a very meagre portion of what it had been centuries before, was no information to the new baronet. Aware of the difficulties which might befall him, and at the same time not without a rather overweening sense of his own

importance and the value to be attached to the home of his ancestors, Ralph Rashleigh had struggled and striven even during the lifetime of his father, to perform his own not unimportant part in diminishing the sorrow which threatened him. But the load of debt seemed like a living thing to take hold of him, and to be for ever pulling himself and his father down—a thing from which he could not escape. Of late days, he and the older man had ceased to have altercations on a subject which was painful to them both. That the place had been heavily mortgaged was no secret to the son, but that more and more of the land was still being mortgaged was a fact that his father thought unnecessary to confide to him, knowing that the estate was as dear to Ralph as it had been to any of his forefathers. The dreary suggestion of a fear as to the possibility of losing it had more than once presented itself like a nightmare to his morbid imagination, but Ralph refused to be haunted by any such wild suggestion.

And now as he sat alone, after the lawyer had had his lunch and departed with papers and baggage in the trap to catch the London train—looking cherubic and self-satisfied as if there were no such things as mortgages and family property in the world—Sir Ralph felt as if the walls of the room and everything about him were falling like a pack of cards.

It was characteristic of the new baronet that he sat perfectly still, though the discovery which he had just made was a bitter one. Who could help it? When Sir George had succeeded to the estate, it was already a rapidly dwindling one. Energy and self-denial might have done much to right things then. But now it was so heavily encumbered that there might be nothing for Sir Ralph to leave to his daughter or his niece. He could wrestle for his own part with the encroaching poverty. But he had loved the land and the surrounding country for the sake of his ancestors. He had ever been a good landlord, caring for the interests of his tenants. And it was a question if he could any longer speak of tenants depending on him. There were, in fact, three sets of people to be considered in a question of this kind—the landlord, the tenants, and the landlord's creditor. It would be a question for the future whether the landlord's creditor would be harder on the tenants than the landlord. For the latter was a man of straw, existing only in the name. It would certainly have been better to have no property at all than the miserable parings which were, after all, his sole inheritance; he was thankful for the first time that there was no heir to carry on the family name.

More than once during this sad soliloquy his fair-haired niece, with the roses blooming on her cheeks, and eyes of the

softest Norwegian blue—true and tender, with long dark lashes—had looked anxiously into the room. But he sent her away somewhat sternly, for the very reason that his heart was yearning over her, and that he had not the courage to inform the girl of the state of his affairs. In his honesty he was most anxious to pay off certain creditors, but to do so he must be involved still further in the clutches of the outlandish neighbour who was the real owner of nearly all that surrounded him. Ralph Rashleigh clenched his fist and brought it heavily to bear on the desk which, till lately, had hidden the much-detested papers, as he muttered to himself, “Who would have dreamt that the fellow could first of all spin his web with such precaution, like a spider to catch a fly? And then that he would come near to us—he of all others, when he knows that the greater part of the land is *his*?”

He was almost ready to curse the strange luck which had caused the mortgages to be nearly all purchased by one man, and he a stranger, and to think his father was to blame for placing them so unreservedly at his disposal. Further thought made him realise how irrational was this bitterness, and acknowledge that the lawyers who were entrusted with the sale could not pick and choose their purchasers, and that if one man—living abroad and having a fancy for the thing—had come forward through his agents on each occasion, never quarrelling with the price, they had no alternative but to sell.

Was it instinct or was it suspicion which made Sir Ralph conjecture, as perhaps his father had conjectured on the fatal morning, that something was wrong, and that the free-handedness which was so eccentric in this fellow might possibly be harmful?

Sir Ralph’s own keen sensitiveness made him nervously aware of some steady and possibly baneful purpose in the transaction from which his own finer nature revolted. How long his melancholy reverie might have continued is doubtful. It was suddenly interrupted by another tap at the door, and a merry little ten-year-old child, so small as to resemble a large wax doll, with dark brown eyes looking black through the long lashes, surmounted by a curly fringe, and a crape dress fancifully cut so as to display to full advantage the graceful little legs, daintily encased in black silk stockings, ran into the room, and, taking no rebuff, leaped like a small fairy on her father’s knee.

“Whatever happens, my Dot, nothing shall harm thee,” said the father, laying a caressing hand on the glossy dark hair, and looking as if he were half relieved from his burden as he glanced at the sparkling eyes and red lips of the little one.

"It was Vere who sent me," said the child, stroking his face with loving action in return. "She said you had been too much alone."

The cloud returned to his face.

"Vere," he muttered, "the girl knows too much. It is bad enough for men to be annoyed by things of this sort—but—*women*——"





Part III.

Say not "No" to such a suitor ;
All I ask is—bless mine, purest of ambitions,
Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free, and happy.

BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the "eights" week at Oxford.

It is needless to say that the unique city, with its host of historical memories—set in by moist green fields and stately trees in the angle formed by the junction of the Cherwell and the Isis—is more beautiful than usual, like its sister University, in the month of May. In the lonely walks of the college gardens, the flame-coloured pyrus, the sprays of the wistaria adorning the old walls, the laburnums beginning to drop their "wells of gold," and the opening lilac-blossoms hanging like plumes upon the bushes, were lighting up the dignified solitudes with brilliancy of colour. While some old chestnuts with wide-spreading branches—under whose shadow perhaps a Heber, a Keble, or divines and scholars of earlier renown, had nursed high thoughts or meditated noble deeds—were putting forth their leafy fans hidden so long within the shining buds.

The genius of University life has changed, let us acknowledge, in most respects for the better. And nothing on this afternoon in May could be more significant of the changes which have revolutionised Oxford, identifying it with the entire English nation, instead of limiting it to certain sections, than the appearance of crowds of bustling, well-dressed, happy-looking people who were hurrying down Corn-Market Street in the direction of Christchurch. If the "Philistine" element did not preponderate, it was pretty clearly to be traced in a good

many faces of the fathers, mothers, sisters, and friends who seemed, as they streamed through the town, completely to destroy the quasi-monastic appearance of the ancient walls and buildings. They were merry enough as they crowded down the "avenue" on their way to the barges, but few among them took heed of the beautiful openings between the trees, or the distant vistas of scenery.

A cynic might have grumbled at the "aggressive juvenility" of some of the youths who were entering for their minor Olympian stakes, with almost as much excitement as if it were that more important race which—as a subject of newspaper chronicling and speculation—ranks only second to the Derby day. And if the atmosphere of jollity seemed to have little in common with the mediævalism so eloquently described by Matthew Arnold, and said still to linger in dreamy precincts and sequestered nooks, it might have pleased Mr. Ruskin as a proof that there is no decadence in our national love of sport.

It had been raining warm, soft showers that morning. But the rain had only left the spring verdure at its freshest and best. The sky had cleared, and there were cool whispers of soft breezes stirring the leaves of some of the trees in the narrower and more beautiful walks, where lazy undergraduates, "clad all in virgin white," had been indulging themselves by sleepily reclining at the bottoms of their punts, listening to the "soft, sweet pipings" of birds in

". . . glades all haunted by gray rains,
And footfalls of the falling shower."

A little while afterwards they were routed from their lairs by the more industrious of their comrades, as the barges became thronged with anxious spectators, and the boats for their races started, the various inmates trying to look as if they were quite superior to the consciousness of the becoming nature of their costumes. Mothers and sweethearts, not so reticent, murmured to each other their approval of the pale blue, the pretty pink, the mauve and white, the magenta, or the bright scarlet, as the case might be. In a short time the excitement commenced. Why describe a spectacle known to so many who have carried memories with them through life of such spring days?

"One is not always young," as a smiling, match-making matron confided to another mother, in excuse for the very evident flirtation of Kate and Jennie with James and Harry, whom "they might never see again," as, a minute afterwards, she sentimentally added, sharp enough to notice that James

had offered a bunch of daffodils to Kate, which the latter, with pink cheeks, was pinning to her dress.

Had she not made great exertions to secure a place for herself and her girls on the 'Varsity barge, or, failing that, on one of the college barges which were ranged in a row, and to-day were looking more gay than usual; and had she not wished it were possible to intrigue in some way with the weather, knowing that the spring toilette which she had taken such pains to secure for her girls would make them look all the prettier if they could throw off the wraps which had been rendered necessary by the rain, and a lingering sharpness in the May wind, telling of a recent severity in the weather? Ah! let us not be too cynical on the weak short-sightedness of such manœuvres, for, as another lady observed with a sigh, "It is not always May," as memories recurred to her of her own young days, and a miserable climax to such plotting in her own particular case.

Close to them was a third mother, a Mrs. Vernon-Smith, who had stinted her ill-dressed, pale-looking girls that every farthing that could be spared from the merest necessities of life should go to young Hayward Vernon-Smith, not that he should achieve success in the schools or fit himself for any calling whatever, but win for himself a place in the University eight—a circumstance which was about as likely to take place as that the cow in the old nursery rhyme should jump over the moon. Only that very morning Mr. Vernon-Smith had informed his better-half that she had made a fool of herself in pinching the family for the superstition of a college education for her spoilt darling, when Mary Ann had been ordered port wine, and they could not afford to give it to her, and the "young dog" was as likely to be as great a stick at rowing as at classics and mathematics.

Poor Mrs. Smith had too high an opinion of her offspring to be daunted by these insinuations, but her hand shook and her heart misgave her, as the parasols which had been raised to shelter some of the young faces from a glint of sunshine were as suddenly lowered, and the boats were shooting past before the nervous lady thoroughly understood which were her son's colours and what all the excitement was about.

Mrs. Smith positively closed her eyes, as the boats with their stalwart figures seemed to swim before her dazzled vision. She afterwards declared that she had seen the pink and violet caps of the Balliol and New College men, with the scarlet of Magdalen—the athletic forms looking to good advantage as they shot past the barges with a clean and even sweep of their oars. But she could not look at the Merton boat, in which her own son was stroke, knowing that this race bore the same analogy to the greater race which she

coveted for her boy as the Bath races bear to Ascot. She heard nothing but a rush of feet on the banks, deafening shouts: "Well done, New!" "Well done, Exeter!" and cries of half the names of the colleges, after which she seemed to wake again to hear that her boy's boat had been "bumped" to a more ignominious place on the river.

"And the last day too," said somebody near her, who seemed to have an interest in the same boat. "They say that stroke lost his head."

"Do you hear that, ma?" asked Mary Ann, not altogether sorry to retort on her mother; "I always told you he would never do it. Why, he lost his head in the same way when we wanted him to take the poker and go down and attack the thief. I heard somebody saying that they should never have a stroke who is liable to loss of nerve, and who hasn't a good lot of stay."

Mrs. Smith was too crushed to put down her daughter with the spirit which she usually showed when Mary Ann opposed her. Terrible recollections of Hayward's "Battells" which had amounted to so much more for the last term than she expected, that she could scarcely now summon courage to tell his father, made her silent and absent-minded.

But Hayward Vernon-Smith was not the only man disappointed.

"Well, Sellwood," said a friend, about half-an-hour afterwards to a disconsolate-looking man who was walking home with the crowd, and speaking to no one, "you did not do as well as we expected."

"I never do," was the reply. "I ought to have been firm enough not to have rowed at all, coming just at this time. I have made a worse mess of my 'Greats' in consequence."

"But it does not matter to *you*," was the answer.

Sellwood shrugged. If he could have spoken his secret thoughts, he would have said that was the [^]pity of it. If he had ever had any relation to encourage him, and to care if he made a success or not, instead of being simply told to make friends and to spend an unlimited amount of money—he might have done better in everything.

They were going with the multitude past the beautiful Christchurch meadows. Even the fools who had just struggled out of the water, having upset their boats from a desire to distinguish themselves, had more friends after all than he had, in spite of his father's urgent messages that he would ensure for himself brilliant acquaintances who would be useful to him in his future life.

There was scarcely a soul whom he cared for in all this crowd. What a motley throng of people it was streaming up

the far-famed walk, whilst now at every Christchurch window, over banks of flowers, peeped out young faces, merry, critical, or even cynical, as the case might be, but few of them jaundiced with the midnight oil. He thought a little bitterly, as he glanced up at them, that these were the swells with whom his father would have liked him to be thick, and that it was a contemptible thing, altogether lowering to a man's self-respect, to be commanded to "make friends" with any persons, as if such friendships would be of material advantage to his future. It seemed to him that his father must be of an uncommonly sanguine disposition to persist in still clinging to the vague hope that he would attach himself to sprigs of the nobility, when evidently his own antecedents would not bear inspection, and no one but a madman would expect money to do everything. In fact, Godfrey Sellwood's only objection to the dark, energetic, well-knit young fellow who was now walking by his side, and whose appearance bore a marked contrast to his own fair-haired, fair-skinned, and somewhat graceful but languid face, was that Charles Lloyd was an Honorable and the younger son of a lord. Charles was a marked contrast to him in every way. Bright and brilliant in his manner, with all the confidence which came to him from the fact that he was well-born if not particularly well-provided in this world's goods, he had not only found Godfrey a valuable ally, always ready with money for every conceivable thing, but a sympathetic friend. For, as he acknowledged to himself, Sellwood—whose connections were probably "fishy," from the fact, that though he mentioned a father, the "old boy" had never shown himself, and was therefore probably unpresentable—had as much of the manners and tone of real gentlefolk as if he had been accustomed to mix with them from his infancy.

Why Sellwood had not done more was a mystery not only to Lloyd but to most people. Great things had been prophesied of him when he was a freshman at St. Anne's. But it could not be said that he had verified any of these prophecies. He had begun well by standing pretty high in an examination for the Hertford, though he himself always declared that the "mention" was owing to a lucky hit. He certainly went in for the Ireland, and was nowhere at all, though his Greek was generally better than his Latin, and though "he," as Charles Lloyd was wont to remark, with the repetition of a hackneyed joke, "was born with no natural aversion to that wretched Aristotle who wrote his horrid philosophy on purpose to *stagger* men with wits, or that over-estimated Plato with whom most folks were dinned till they were quite as ready to swallow poison as ever Socrates was."

"No, it looked a little fishy," that friend was wont to declare,

with the usual candour of friends, "that Sellwood actually stood well for the Hertford in his first year, and then went in and did nothing the next. Somehow he lost his first in 'Mods,' and after that he got disgusted with the whole thing, and found out, as I could have told him before, that classical education was all a mistake. Why, it makes one shudder to think, if there had not been a bonfire of that Alexandrian library, there would have been a lot more red-ink lines and wretched notes for us to make."

That was Charlie's explanation of his friend's apparent failure, and probably it was not so far from the truth. After the discovery that classical education was a mistake, Sellwood had taken a little to the sports. He was a "fair bat," a "fair oar," but not absolutely good at either. Probably because he did not take the pains, and preferred lying lazily on his back, and reading poetry in one of those hiding-places amongst the grasses, to be discovered beside the little Cherwell before it falls into the Isis. Punting on a summer's day in a white flannel suit involves no great exertion of strength, and seemed to be congenial to Godfrey Sellwood's retiring nature. There were occasions, however, on which he could emerge from his ordinary shyness, and he had even been known to give hints to his friend, Charlie Lloyd, when the latter was preparing his brilliant speeches for the Union.

But even at the Union, Sellwood had not distinguished himself. His delivery was that of a man who was struggling with his ideas, thinking, as it were, the thought over and over again, and labouring to clothe it with such expression as should represent it to his fellows. Nor did it add to his popularity that, though words were not always ready with him, he was fastidious about their right use, and quick to detect the weak part of an epigram, or the confusion of metaphors—marring the construction of some high-sounding sentence, which, picked to pieces, could be proved to mean nothing at all. Unlike the Honorable Charles (who was accused of having "ratted" in his political creed since he came to Oxford, his family traditions having been in favour of Toryism, whilst the majority of the more original speakers were Radicals), Sellwood seldom changed his opinions, and clung to ideas which he had formed from boyhood with a tenacity-unusual for one so young. He seldom volunteered a remark in company unless he had something to say. And, although he had joined the debating club,—where the grave questions of whether Mr. Disraeli was or was not a traitor to his country, and whether the Oxford youth should lend its patronage to Church and State, were discussed and settled with a vehemence which was perfectly innocent, and proved a whetstone for sharpening wits,—he never made more

than one speech of any length—a speech which led to the report that he not only stammered, but had something wrong in his bronchial arrangements, when, after all, he was merely nervous, merely in search of the right words.

In company he had been somewhat silent, having no taste for wine or breakfast parties, not intending to be unsocial, but preferring the friendship of a few. Perhaps the natural indolence of his constitution, which made it somewhat hard for him to exert himself to overcome obstacles, had much to do with this love of retirement; perhaps it was that the hurry and fulness of modern life, the crowd of fresh thoughts, the new discoveries in science, and the desire to grapple with the problems of his age, were together somewhat overpowering to a man of his temperament, and he required to realise them in solitude.

Alone with young Lloyd he was perfectly at his ease. The “burden of the mystery” of life ceased to oppress him, and the crux of how to reconcile religion and politics, looking upon them as one, could for a time be put on one side. The two friends were each moved in different ways by the “*Zeit-geist*,” though they might interpret it in a different manner. They enjoyed their battles-royal, their skirmishes of words which did not become seriously warlike, for both at heart were Radicals, with a natural love for social equality and a desire to meet others on the same level and enter into their grievances. It mattered little by what party names they called themselves. The truest statesman, Conservative or not, must have sympathised with their burning enthusiasm to snap Gordian knots which their fathers had tried to untie in vain, whilst he might have smiled a little sadly at their somewhat crude impatience to set right those complicated social problems, whether of land, property, or national health, which had baffled many and harder heads. It was the desire for brotherhood and comradeship which was the hopeful element in their case. And though it pleased Charlie Lloyd to draw back on occasions, or to make a great deal of the few questions on which he had thought it desirable to give out that he had changed his opinions, with a pugnacity that was pertinacious, this was all the more invigorating.

“I shall come up to your rooms for coffee, after hall to-night,” said the latter with a nod, as the two men separated in High Street, Godfrey Sellwood turning into the quadrangle of St. Anne’s, and Charlie Lloyd crossing over to — college, with its queer Dutch windows to the chapel, and its Common room where old Sam Johnson, according to his boast, sometimes “drank off three bottles of port without being the worse for it.”

CHAPTER II.

CHARLIE LLOYD did not "look in" quite so early that evening as he had promised, a matter which did not cause Godfrey much surprise. For was not Lloyd one of the most popular men at Oxford; not a "fast" man in the ordinary sense, but up to all the fun which was going on; not a wine-bibber to any serious extent, but the life of a wine-party? Was it not the ambition of many, who found it difficult to maintain their own standing in a place which shifted its population every three years, to be seen arm-in-arm as if they were on the closest terms of intimacy with this well-looking, well-born young fellow, who took his social "honours" in a way which was peculiar to himself.

Godfrey was not in the best of spirits as he sat alone waiting for him in his picturesque room, which was one of the finest in the quadrangle, large if low-roofed, and with cushioned window-seats commanding a peaceful view of an old moss-grown churchyard, on which the setting sun had but a short time before cast its golden rays. The stars were coming out now, and Godfrey, who had chosen to dine alone—with his dinner laid by a solemn scout, who looked as if he himself had graduated in all the learning of the University—now retired from the window, and seated himself in a cosy arm-chair by his reading-lamp.

It was before the modern revival of domestic art, when "æstheticism," as it is called, could be paraded as an excuse for organized attacks on the persons of undergraduates, who burn incense or worship peacock's-feathers. It did not occur to Godfrey to have lilies in his room and to offer reverence to them more than to other flowers. But flowers were crowded together in profusion on one of his tables, simply because he cared for those beautiful things which seem to be born of the air and the sunshine almost as much as the tints of the rainbow, and had given orders to his scout to see that he was always to be supplied with them. Of course he was cheated about the prices for them, as he was about most things. But, as his father wished him to make a sensation by spending as much money as possible on the Oxford tradespeople, this was a matter of no consequence. Godfrey was fleeced with impunity, but the "sensation" was far off still.

All that could be said in excuse of this lavish expenditure was that his room was furnished with scholarly taste. Of old

china, which was one of the lad's hobbies, there was a plentiful supply (not of plates, as now, crawling up the walls, or hanging from the ceiling in a way to make nervous people feel as if they are standing beneath so many swords of Damocles, but of vases standing on the floor, of various sizes and beautiful shapes). There were pictures, exquisitely selected, of water-colour and oil on the walls, with a few rare line engravings. A glass lamp of artistic design (where now there would be a Japanese one) was suspended from the ceiling; and a piano with a finely carved case (it had not occurred to Godfrey to fling an Indian scarf over it) stood open with a violin near it, and some of Mendelssohn's and Beethoven's music on the stand. In one corner of the room there was a trophy of pipes, and musical instruments, amongst which was a Syrian drum. Godfrey was a member of a glee club which on the previous evening had performed for a temperance society. They had chosen Mendelssohn's vintage song, as peculiarly appropriate for the occasion, and had entered it on the programme as "Selections from Lorelei."

Side by side with the defects in the young fellow's nature were many high qualities—keenness of perception, a temperament yielding readily to culture, an organisation as acutely sensitive to changes in the social atmosphere as his musical ear was fine to changes of sound, an inclination to choose employments which were congenial to him, and a retiring tendency which perhaps might have been inherited from his mother, or perhaps was a result of his peculiar education. To those skilful appraisers of character who pride themselves on cataloguing a man or a woman according to their surroundings in the rooms which they generally inhabit,—forgetting that such things may be studied even when they appear most careless—it would have been easy to form a tolerably accurate estimate of the versatility of Godfrey Sellwood. His very books told a tale. English literature figured largely as well as German and French, threatening to outnumber the conventional Latin and Greek. And amongst them were rare editions of the best illustrated literature of the day, and a splendidly bound copy of Turner's "*Liber Studiorum*," for which he was said to have given an almost fabulous price. Probably if the lad had been poor, or if he had had relations to be interested in his success, he might have made a speciality of one of his many gifts. But as he sat with his slippers on, waiting for Lloyd to come in and have one of his usual talks, and as he watched his own thoughts as it were in a cloud of curling smoke (having no aunt, cousin, or sister to inform him that smoking was an illicit practice), the provoking part of it was that he saw as plainly as any one else could have

told him, how—because his wages had been a free gift to him, and he had had nothing to stimulate him—he had been too lazy to do anything.

“Put your Irishman in a free cottage, with lots of potatoes to eat, and he’ll never rise any higher,” he said to himself—that being one of the questions under dispute between himself and young Lloyd, which one or the other was going to settle for the good of the community.

“Now it was the Pater’s mistake to keep me like a prince, when he himself probably worked hard enough in his time.” The shifting of the responsibility in this way on “the Pater,” led him for the hundredth time into another reverie. Why, if there was anything in the doctrine of heredity, did he and “the Pater” have so little in common? His father made no secret of having sprung from the people, and seemed at times to be proud of it. According to Godfrey’s theories it *was* a thing to be proud of—a self-made man had nothing to be ashamed of. But why was there a mystery? Why did his father seem to have positively no connections? His own experience of the first year of his university training had furnished him with an acute instinct which advised him of the impossibility of attempting to introduce people to each other, in the case of the one set being refined, and the other utterly unpresentable. But not only did the young blood in him rise in a sort of scorn against any such meanness as that which disallows honest kith and kin for the sake of a little inconvenience happening to oneself; he was confronted with another difficulty. He could just remember his mother in some foreign country, a pale delicate woman, rather crushed and feeble, but apparently with all the habits of a lady.

As far as he could recall it, his mother had never had reason to complain of ill-treatment. She had simply been neglected, and his fear was that she had died, as some plants do, from the absence of light and sunshine. She could not presumably have had anything in common with the stern, self-reliant man who treated her with deferential politeness, but had apparently centred his attentions on his child. In this case it had not been the usual cause and effect of love begetting love. The young fellow was inclined bitterly to resent, for his mother’s sake, a course of conduct which it seemed to him was lowering to womanhood in general. That he himself should be valued was of small importance to him. He knew nothing about his father’s antecedents. He did not even know the extent of his fortune, nor did Reuben become more communicative as his son grew up. His father’s reputation as a business man had apparently been without a stain. He made a point of keeping his word with his

servants and dependants, and, so far as Godfrey knew, he had never wronged a single person. His actions might be a trifle less hard than his words to the people who were beneath him, but words and actions were both hard enough. How would he and his father "hit it off" when they happened to come together, seeing that they held different opinions about nearly everything under the sun? He had tried to put off the evil day as long as possible, but now it was close upon him.

Godfrey's soliloquy was interrupted by a sharp, quick rap at the door of his room.

"Come in," he said, not sorry to hear the rap, and to welcome the brisk man with the big forehead, bright expression of face, and clear brown eyes, whose company was always welcome to him. "Hullo, Lloyd! you won't find most people in the world as patient as I am—coffee gone cold."

"I don't expect to find many as dreamy," answered the other. "No, not that thing with the carved back; I broke it the last time I was here," he continued, pushing away the high-backed chair, and flinging himself down on the sofa. "You are like Carlyle, you know—quite superior to time and space, and all those world-enveloping appearances."

"Space!" said the other, interrogatively, as he looked, in his meditative way, at the smoke from his cigar. "I'm not a ghost yet."

"Yes, you are—a ghost in a body. But you, with your riches, can reduce to a minimum the inconvenience of that body. You can travel almost as quickly as Puck, if it so pleases you; whilst I, poor wretch, a younger son, and not being afflicted with the chronic malady of too many thousands, am doomed to be content with Lincoln's Inn, celibacy, and the Bar."

"The Bar?" rejoined Sellwood, to whom the information was new. "So you have made up your mind? It's a road that begins seductively, and ends—where?"

"Well, it leads to most things."

"To those who win."

Hitherto Charlie Lloyd, with all his expansiveness, had had a certain shyness about his plans for the future, with which his friends did not interfere. At one time he had planned to remain at Oxford, but academic life began to pall upon him, and he longed for a wider arena, directly it was found that he had taken a degree which was not so good as had been expected.

"I mean to win," he responded, with his brightest smile. "Of course there'll be lots of snubbings to which one has not been used, but they are good for the moral constitution—and there's a chance of being left by the receding tide."

"High and dry, like some of the rubbish left behind from a wreck. No, that will be quite impossible for *you*," answered Sellwood, with a shake of the head, and looking at him with approving eyes.

"Well, I must take my chance of it; it's a refuge for the destitute, the best I can get. After all, it's the political life which has most temptation for me."

"A future representative of your country," answered Godfrey, with a smile; "you must change your ideas a little before that time comes."

"I must be a disciple of patience, to say the least of it," answered the other, with a sigh, "wedded to my ink-bottle and musty law-books for the——"

"Doubtful hope of becoming a Q.C.," interrupted Sellwood, waking into life and throwing away the end of his now finished cigar, "oh, you won't see much of the chambers in which you will be supposed to spend your life—there will be balls, and dinners, and conversaziones, or whatever else you call them; and then you have your eye upon politics. Good! You will fight your battles and succeed in them as you succeed in everything you take up. You have the power of concentration—ay, and of fascination too—the fates have denied them both to me. It will be simply for you to go in and win in literature and everything else, just as you have won at the debates here in a certain sense—though you have talked a lot of bosh—you were made for success."

"Stop, my good fellow—if it's the literature, the cutting language, and anonymous vivisection of the review which is to deprive some poor devil of an author of his night's rest, I should say it was a precious deal more in your line than mine."

"I—I have made a mull of everything. My 'Greats' are sure to be mulled, and I spoilt the chances of our boat because I had not the courage to say 'No' about attempting both. No, I am off at once. I feel half ashamed to show my face."

"Don't you wait for Commem.?"

"Why should I? If the jokes were worth anything—but they are sure to be stale as well as noisy. It's not quite so bad as it used to be when the noise was like the row in a theatre on Boxing-night. But one can still read in the newspapers about the 'man in the straw hat.' They have established a precedent to let the fellows make fools of themselves, and precedents in my opinion are always a mistake."

"Not *always*," answered Lloyd. In spite of being impregnated with the young reforming spirit which likes to sweep away old abuses and to introduce anything new—speculating a little too rashly and perhaps too familiarly on all sorts of

subjects hitherto supposed to be unassailable—Charlie Lloyd had, as I have hinted before, his own little reserves on which the popular Iconoclasm was not to be exercised. "I can't agree with you," he continued, with his usual combativeness, springing to his feet as if ready for a battle. "Precedents are not *always* a mistake. For instance, the law of primogeniture is a capital one, though I would not stand in my brother's shoes for something, I can tell you.

"A good many other people would," answered Sellwood, who was too much out of spirits to take up the glove which he knew had been flung down to him for championship.

"They wouldn't if they knew all. Call a lord free? Why, he is a slave—the puppet of the people—ten times less free than the peasant who earns enough and no more for his daily meals."

Sellwood simply shrugged his shoulders at this outburst, and lit another cigar, while his friend—now standing on his feet with his brown eyes sparkling and looking so much like a young war-horse scenting the battle, that Godfrey almost expected to see his ears go up and his nostrils dilate—went on, as if expecting to be contradicted.

"Free! Why, I'm the free one. I assure you I feel sometimes when I am with Newderry as if I have an air of quite impertinent independence. It is he who has to sacrifice himself for the good of his country—his very name and the way in which people look at him is an infliction——"

"Only to be borne by one of a great nature," said Sellwood drily.

"Ah, yes. Why, when they see us together, the very cut of his clothes and the set of his necktie become matters for criticism—he can hardly ever look right, that's because they whisper, 'Look at him, he's the lord.' Would you expect a lord to be short, or at all mean in appearance? The *ὄϊ πολλοὶ* say no, and condemn Newderry accordingly. If the poor wretch is tired they shake their heads and say 'dissipated,' while as for me I'm let off lightly—that's his brother, you know, nothing."

"You're always let off lightly."

"I'm used to it, you see, from the time I used to play football, and, not having enough weight to be a 'forward,' learned to slip in between the fellows' arms and legs like an eel. But between ourselves, you know, I expect they'll alter a good deal of all this by-and-by. When lords get sick of state and long for a seat in the Lower Parliament, where they can express themselves with better effect—it may be only a feather, yet it shows——"

"That a tedious parade of greatness begins to pall on

them?" said Sellwood interrogatively. From long habit he had been accustomed to finish young Lloyd's disjointed sentences, who, also from habit, expected it of him.

Both men were well aware that this conversation on an old topic which was pretty well threadbare, was kept up with a show of excitement on Charlie's part, purposely to ward off another undebateable subject which was uppermost in the minds of both. For as soon as Lloyd had heard, a few weeks before, that Sellwood's father had settled in —shire he had invited himself, as a matter of course, to spend a portion of his summer holiday at Broadmeads, and had met with a discouragement. Now, without any vulgar fawning upon wealth, Charlie Lloyd was unaffectedly fond of Sellwood, and the latter was too good and useful a friend to be easily lost sight of.

Yet Sellwood was now leaving Oxford for good. He, on his own part, had declined Lloyd's offers of hospitality with a decision which could not fail to cause surprise; and now, while etiquette forbade that Lloyd should again introduce the subject of his own proffered visit to Broadmeads, Sellwood remained stubbornly silent.

The latter suffered acutely in maintaining a silence which he knew would be misinterpreted. For, if Lloyd cared for him, he cared ten times more for Lloyd; his being one of those deep-hearted, sensitive natures, whose loyalty is unobtrusive and whose love was "passing the love" of—well, at any rate, of *some* women. No sour envy had been allowed to mar the goodwill which Godfrey had ever felt for his more popular and prosperous friend. To part from him would be one of the keenest trials of his life. If the two friends were to be torn apart, it was Sellwood's nature and not Lloyd's which would be left bleeding at the pith. And yet, when Charlie Lloyd broke off in his rattling speech, there was an awkward pause for a minute. In that minute Sellwood had for the last time turned it over in his mind and decided—he *could not* ask Lloyd to come to Broadmeads—he *could not* introduce him to his father.

"What a strange and yet universal law it seems, that other people's lots in life always appear to us better than our own!" he said, a little wearily, by way of breaking the silence. "This rank, you think, and these vested interests—with which I cannot say I sympathise—bring their own curse. Very likely, but how much greater is the curse of being a sort of social pariah. Do not think I am not proud of the fact that no blood but that of the people runs in my veins. I have often said so, but to have no one belonging to one with whom one can——"

It was like himself to stammer a little, but unlike himself

to leave his sentence in his turn unfinished ; probably to regret that he had commenced it. Lloyd gave him a rapid glance, which he immediately regretted, as the colour sprang to the Saxon face, and spread to the roots of the fair hair, though Sellwood still preserved his meditative attitude.

"Surely you would never misunderstand me like that," flashed out the quick-spoken Charlie—with about as much thought as when he had ventured a celebrated simile concerning the "pendulum of liberty going jog-trot on the plains of time"—"We've been too close friends, you and I, for our friendship to be allowed to——"

"Allowed to what?" asked Sellwood, with his brightest smile, whilst Charlie, unassisted, muttered something about the "absurdity of being influenced by a hair's breadth of difference here and there in social distinctions."

"Getting to your weights and pendulums once more?" asked Godfrey. "Are you going to tell me again 'You are one of those people who walk through life on a ladder of paradox,' or 'You and I are like two mill-stones, grinding one another away till we become like Kilkenney cats'?"

And both men were not sorry to break out into one of those hearty laughs which made the parting between them easier.

CHAPTER III.

MEANWHILE it could not be said that matters went on smoothly between the owners of Broadmeads and Rashleigh Park.

"They are neighbours," said the Tarringmoor people, "but *so* uncongenial."

Sir Ralph was low-spirited and wretched ; the wrinkles began to show deeply on his pallid face. Other men, less fastidious, might have found some way of wriggling out of the network with which he had been so skilfully surrounded, but the baronet was too honourable about debt to avail himself of the numerous plans for evading his increasing difficulties which modern subtlety might have suggested. Having a conscience which would reproach him for devising means of escape of which other men would not have been

ashamed, he tried to think of it as a morbid thing which had done him an ill turn. But the conscience stood firmly in spite of his efforts to be free to it, and he could only vent his vexation on those around him. Misfortune had been to Sir Ralph no sweetener of the temper. He had passed through much suffering in his life, and the suffering had been all the more terrible because it had been quiet, but it had left its marks on him nevertheless.

He showed these marks more than usual on one evening towards the end of May, when he was sitting alone in his study with a pile of papers before him, and with a very traceable likeness to some of his ancestors whose portraits decorated the walls of the room, and who seemed to stare at him with surprise and disapproval.

The impossibility of spending any extra shillings on keeping up the necessary repairs of the house was noticeable from the state of those paintings, as well as that of the tapestry-covered arm-chair on which Sir Ralph was reclining, and which bore many signs of the depredations of moths, the horsehair protruding unpleasantly in several places. The portraits were cracked and faded, displaying the canvas here and there. Some of the worthies had received injuries to their noses, and others to their eyes; but all stared, and some smiled with cold equanimity. The sadness and solitude of the night, the dull light of the wax candles which were burning low in their sockets, and the funereal company of his ancestors, were overcoming Sir Ralph with the melancholy which had been too constantly his companion of late—when he gave a scarcely perceptible start. He was too accustomed to his niece's noiseless tread to be much surprised when he saw that Vere was standing near him. She often glided into the room with a determination to resist his cynicism, though he sometimes resented her intrusion.

"Uncle, it is late, and you are bothering yourself again about those stupid letters," she said, trying to speak merrily, but with a little catch in her breath which proved that the effort of intruding upon his privacy had cost her something.

Hers was not one of those weak natures which acquiesce in all that is arranged for them. On the contrary, an energy which was unconquerable, and a will which was capable of endurance, might have been discerned by a skilled physiognomist in her firm lips and steadfast eyes. The face, if it was not exactly bright, because it had a look of care in it scarcely natural for one so young, was softened by an expression of pitying tenderness, as she stood gazing down upon him with her fair hair thrown into vivid relief by the dark oak panelling of the old room. She could deny herself willingly for those

whom she loved, though subjection of a slavish sort would have been impossible to her.

But it was characteristic of Sir Ralph, and in keeping with his chronic state of petulant dissatisfaction, that he not only noticed with a pang of disapproval the dark-stuff dress trimmed with rusty crape, when he would have liked to see folds of some delicate muslin, just open to display the white gleaming of her neck ; but that he told himself the bright flush which went and came with the varying emotions of the speaker, and the unusual lustre of the blue eyes, were due to the —shire climate—an evanescent lustre of flesh and blood, a mere glory of colour for which a skilful judge would prophesy a very limited duration.

“She will be nothing to look at in a few years’ time, and I cannot afford to bring her out properly. They will say that I neglected poor Richard’s child,” he was thinking to himself, as he said aloud, a little querulously :

“How often have I asked you to dress yourself more prettily ? The very servants must blame *me*, when they see you going about like that.”

Another girl, proud as himself, might have resented the speech. For she knew that *he* knew, as well as she knew herself, that he had supplied her with no pin-money for pretty evening toilettes, and that it was only owing to the most dexterous management of domestic details that she was able to keep her little cousin tidy, and supply the wages for the servants.

It was only with a deeper flush and with a tender, little, protective air, gracious all the more because she was homely in her dignity, that she answered him :

“We are in mourning, you know.”

“You are in mourning, but you need not be shabby ; there is nothing left for you poor children but the scrag-ends, instead of meat.”

He covered his face with his hand. She did not answer, but drew a chair close to his. She had heard that some people loved each other so well that to be near each other was enough ; their love was of the trusting kind, they did not need to speak. And there was a great yearning for love in the heart of this orphan girl, shut out by her poverty and the circumstances of her life from the society which her uncle considered to be suitable for one of her birth, and equally debarred from making friendships with those whom he supposed to be beneath her.

“You ought to be in bed,” he said, after a pause.

“I thought,” she answered, timorously, “that perhaps I could help you ?”

“About what ?” a little sharply.

“About those—letters.”

"Have I not told you again and again that women have nothing to do with business?"

"But you know what the doctors say, and, if your heart is not strong, you ought not surely to be sitting up and worrying yourself in this way."

"Who dares to say I *worry*? Is it likely that I would degrade myself to be worried—actually *worried*—by the little gnat-like stings of that pettifogging creature who has come to live near us? They say he is reserved—*reserved* indeed—when he is always troubling me with his vulgar, interfering letters. He knows that I do not keep an agent, and so he takes advantage to write like one of those people who have risen and who do not know the manners of gentlemen. Our estates, forsooth, join each other, and he has unlimited resources at his command. So at one time he complains of that tower in our grounds, because, forsooth, it obstructs his view; at another he advises me to thin my timber, because it interferes with a free current of air so that it cannot be good for myself; and at another it is that a pond should be drained, and then he talks nonsense about sanitary commissioners. The fussy, restless interference of these people who are nobodies, just because they happen to have made a little money! There—I will show you my answers, if you care to look at them—I have kept copies," and he pushed them before her.

She read,

"It is nonsense to suppose that you must build up a high wall, because our old summer-house—called the Tower—overlooks your grounds. The Tower is rarely used and has stood there for more than a hundred years. If you were to consult the antiquarians, you would hear that some of them think its foundations date from the seventeenth century. It would be madness to pull it down, while if you build a wall it will be greater folly to shut out my air and impede my view."

And again,

"I can by no means agree with you as to the propriety of denying the people the right of way, which they have had ever since I can remember, in a footpath through the park. We Rashleighs have always prided ourselves on conceding these privileges to the poor. It is not *my* fault that the increasing numbers on the estate have to toil in a state of squalor from year to year, since these have no longer the monopoly of poverty. But while many of their wants might be neutralised by prompt attention on the part of a really rich man like yourself—the actual owner of a large part of the property—I consider it a piece of selfish interference to deny the poor a right which they have always had."

"Oh, uncle, I don't think that will exactly do," remonstrated Vere, "do you think it wise to irritate him like that?"

"He irritates *me*," said Sir Ralph, angrily. "These nonsensical, caddish *nouveaux-riches* are always interfering with that 'longing for confirmed tranquillity' which, if you had come to my age, child, you would 'know' as Wordsworth said, 'to be one of the inherent wants of humanity.'"

An outsider would have seen the humorous side in the disputes which were ever cropping up between the combatants, with the victory remaining undecided. More than once the two neighbours had met in their walks through the village with no further result than the meeting of two evenly-matched dogs, who growl, show their teeth, and after all turn tail without coming to actual encounter.

But Vere looked sufficiently grave as she glanced at the correspondence which had been a fruitful source of sleepless nights to her irritated uncle.

"Fancy the impudence of a fellow," he continued, "who could write me such a thing as this, 'The trees want thinning on your ground—the fir-walk especially is in a very bad state.' And when I answer, 'Thanks, but my fir-walk pleases me,' has the positive insolence to write again, 'If you change your mind and would like to sell your timber, I will offer you a good price for it.'"

"Perhaps he knows——" began Vere, and then faltered, fearing the expression of her uncle's face and unable to finish her speech.

"*Perhaps he knows!*" thundered Sir Ralph. "If he does, he has no right to brag about it. Depend upon it I know my 'Evelyn' on trees fifty times better than he with his vulgar modern theories. I thought you had more spirit, that you resented as much as I do the change in the Old Country when a beggar's son can be a millionaire and a good old family reduced to beggary. How can you twit me with 'perhaps he knows?'"

And he, who had been pacing about the room restlessly, while his niece looked at the letters, now sat down again hopelessly, and covered his face with his hands.

There was nothing more to be done, as Vere knew from sad experience, when once she had blundered on an unfortunate speech. The same experience had taught her to avoid altercation, and the unfortunate uncle was positively relieved when, on changing his attitude a few minutes afterwards, he found that he was alone.

"She has obeyed me, and gone to bed," he said to himself. "She is much more obedient than my own child. I have not much to complain of."

And then—though the figures were literally dancing before his eyes—he sat down again to his account-book, telling himself that it was his increasing duty to place his affairs before himself without reserve.

It was past one o'clock when he spread another note out before his tired eyes in the handwriting which was so odious to him, and which had been received but the day before from his neighbour. It convinced him that the man, who seemed to have eyes as sharp and arms as far-reaching as the octopus, was aware of a further loss which had happened to him lately—a disaster which he had supposed to be known only to himself.

“I wonder how he, who enjoys a reputation of omnipotence, and who could not endure the slightest reverse, would like to have this sort of patronising letter himself,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. Yet the note might have seemed a kind one to outsiders who knew nothing of the curious relations between the two men.

It closed with offering the baronet a loan of ten thousand pounds, if he wished to recoup himself for his loss, and was signed, as it seemed to him, in mockery :

“I have the honour to be, your obedient servant, Reuben Sellwood.”

Sir Ralph felt a shiver down his back as he read the words and the signature. Destiny seemed to be against him. He looked round the room, with which he had been so familiarly acquainted since his boyhood, with the unsympathetic ancestors staring down at him, and felt as if he were one of those victims exposed to a peculiar form of torture in the middle ages. For the walls seemed to be slowly advancing and closing in upon him, the floor appeared to be rising, and the ceiling, sinking. He would soon be crushed between the complex machinery which had been devised to grind him to powder. If he accepted this loan, he would then be more fully than ever in the power of an upstart whom he hated. If he did not accept, he would be in his power still, and some people might consider his refusal to be graceless.

The painful emotions of pride and agony had never been contending more strongly in his heart than when he seized the pen, and humiliated himself by saying what was not true, that he was much obliged for the offer, and asking to be given a few days for reflection before he availed himself of it.

CHAPTER IV.

GODFREY shirked "Commemoration," as he had intended, and returned to Broadmeads by the end of May.

Had the lad been returning from South Africa, his father could not have made more pompous preparations to receive him; but, in truth, South Africa or the North Pole would have been all the same to Reuben Sellwood. He had been rather proud than otherwise when his son had shown the slightest tendency towards extravagance.

This had been all very well at a distance. It was years since the father and the son had met, the latter spending his holidays on the Continent, and the former supplying him with lavish money for his travelling expenses, like a King Log from the other side of the Atlantic.

Godfrey knew little more of his father than if he had been King Log. His childhood still haunted him with a number of shadowy recollections, amongst which he himself—a very white and solemn child with a good deal of individuality and embryonic philosophy—had seemed to creep, a pale little figure, among the shadows.

Few children had lived in a more sunless atmosphere. And yet there had been a sort of uncompromising downrightness about the boy which made him long to get to the heart of things. A longing which was rather increased than otherwise, when, as Reuben sarcastically expressed it, the lad had taken "intellectual measles." Then it was that he found he had nothing in common with the reserved, defiant man, who came across the seas to visit him once when he was at school, who seemed to have lapsed into an indifference, as bad as the worst forms of cynicism. Godfrey could not know that the indifference was studied; he was only too well aware that his father would try to crush his own inquiring spirit, and that he might as well keep to himself all questions which he was ready to venture respecting his birthplace, and the memories which they might be supposed to share in common.

The two met as if they had been strangers in the new house at Broadmeads on an evening late in May. A dispassionate spectator might have discerned something pathetic in the restrained feeling on either side which manifested itself in the deferential manner of the son, and in the little expressions which escaped him betraying the tenor of his thoughts, and making his father conclude that the lad was fearfully sensitive,

just like his mother. Reuben was rather pleased to observe this trait of character, which proved to him that he possessed a piece of Parian marble which would require more gentle handling than usual, and was quite unconscious that he himself was trembling with some strange repressed feeling, and was scarcely able to articulate at times from excitement. Unknown to himself, he had been queerly anxious about the appearance of his "poet." By the light of the flaring gas, which Godfrey mentally likened to that of a first-class waiting-room at a railway station, Reuben saw a tall young fellow with sloping shoulders, a little pale but with features which had been pronounced good by the sex that ought to know, with a build which was slender and muscular, brilliant eyes, and a maturity of forehead which was startling in one so young. He was scarcely familiar with the type, but he looked at him with pride; while the young man himself was relieved to find that his father was not, as he had supposed, vulgar by nature, but was evidently possessed of a good deal of character.

Godfrey was up betimes on the following morning. He escaped from the brand-new house, with the colours which set his teeth on edge, and even from the pictures which his father had selected, to watch the promise of cloudless splendour in the early dawn, and to console himself for a somewhat sleepless night by listening to the gush of bird-music which filled the pauses of his thoughts, as the first sun-shafts glanced down on the slopes and lawns of freshest grass.

Even then, it was not the newly-planted evergreens which attracted him, nor the greenhouses, which were full of pyramids of rose-hued azaleas. Instinctively he bent his steps to the oldest part of the park—that which had not been newly planted, but was a part of the property which had originally belonged to the Rashleighs. He had heard nothing of the story, but his fastidious taste was gratified by the gray trunks of the old oak-trees, and the moss-stained boles of the beeches with glimpses between them of far-off reaches of the river. Beyond the river was the purple moorland melting away into the distance, and from an old gate which led away from his father's grounds could be seen the roofs of cottages and orchards with clustering trees still bearing here and there traces of lingering blossom. Something of easy grace in his son's attitude caught Reuben's eye, as he hurried up to him, and saw him leaning against the gate.

"Well?" he said to him, with a well-pleased smile. "Pleased with the prospect? I thought as much. By-and-by you will be monarch of all you survey."

He forgot himself a little, and rubbed his hands. Something in the action, as well as the quotation which betrayed the

direction of his father's thoughts, jarred on the young man's mood. He shifted his attitude a little impatiently, and made no longer an attractive foreground to the picture, as he answered :

"Does it not strike you that we can admire things just as well when we don't possess them? It is surely a poverty-stricken and a selfish spirit, which would lead us to appreciate because we can appropriate?"

He regretted the speech as soon as it was uttered, remembering how, in his childhood, his father had never been contradicted, but had been absolute master in his mother's eyes, just as if they had lived in feudal times. The recollection gave him a pang, when he recalled the figure of his gentle mother, who had been apparently a refined woman, but who had always contented herself with the secondary part, watching carefully for her husband's meaning, glossing over his inaccuracies of speech, and endeavouring so to lead up to his best effects that it seemed to Reuben himself as if he had said a fine thing when he had only uttered some bald truism. The remembrance of the surprising assistance which could be given by a sympathetic wife in doing nothing to irritate an overbearing man, softened Godfrey a little. For his mother's sake he would not wrangle more than he could help over his father's sayings. He would look upon him as much as possible as a diamond, though a rough one, and try to ignore the fact that he and his father were opposed to each other in traditions, ideas, religion—everything.

"I did not mean," he began, apologetically, "that it is not a fine thing for a man by his own nervous energy to be able to push on, and make the best of every opportunity. In that sense great wealth may represent great labours and achievements—of course it is in the highest degree honourable."

"Eh!" said Reuben, to whom these niceties of expression were almost as incomprehensible as if he had been physically deaf—so near is moral deafness to physical—but who had been listening to his son's explanation as if he were hearing some air at the opera. "I didn't think you could be such a fool as not to appreciate it. Ah! all the good things in life come to the young people in the present day. It is the parents who slave, who are ready to cut themselves up into pieces to please their offspring, and after all—well, everything is taken without a thank-you."

Hitherto, the father and the son had so little understood each other that there had been a sort of fear—unacknowledged on the part of Reuben—always between them.

The orthography of the father's letters had been somewhat extraordinary. And now that he counted on displaying the

fields and the timber which he had always coveted to his son, he was conscious of being constrained and uncomfortable. He had been revolving many thoughts—very earthy and entirely unsentimental—in his head, and felt that now he had broken ground it would be his duty to go through with them. He had not been able to shake off his reserve for many a long day, and it would be something to be able to throw off the mask a little in the presence of his own flesh and blood. His spirits were scarcely equal to the occasion, and yet he administered a thumping blow in the mid-chest to his son, at which Godfrey did not stagger, though he looked as if he could have dispensed with it.

"Yes, it'll all belong to you," he said, "thanks to what I have done for you—a good part of the moor, with the cottages as far as you can see—you can cut down the trees if you like; you can leave your mark on it, anyhow."

There was an odd expression in the young man's face as he looked curiously at his father, with a significantly humorous curl of the somewhat too flexuous lips.

"I wonder where the right ends? If I were to burn down the cottages, for instance, I suppose it would not exactly be legal?"

Again Reuben did not follow him. He was thinking:

"What a good thing it is that he should take to early rising, a virtue"—as he added to himself—"in which many of those Oxford chaps are wretchedly deficient."

But Godfrey's spirits sank as his father's rose, and on the following morning his usual languor had gained on him. He had not sufficient energy to turn out of bed. Nature's normal school of sentiment, the family, seemed to be, like other things, a failure. It is a consequence of our rapid civilisation that the younger generation should in many cases outstep the elder, and that the sons should be keenly conscious of the ignorance of the fathers. And it is probably only where a son is sensitive that such a consequence should seem to take the bloom off the flowers of life.

The table was heaped with dainties, and adorned with the brightest silver and the finest linen, when Godfrey made his appearance late at the breakfast-table the next morning. But, with a keen sense of what pleased the lad, Reuben saw that his eyes were directed to a bunch of hothouse flowers whose tender, waxen petals adorned a crystal vase in the centre of the table.

"Ah, that's something better than picking a lot of rubbish out of the hedges as most folks is obliged to do," said Reuben sharply. And again he was conscious that he had managed to touch some wrong chord.

It was probably his state of exhilaration which accounted for the lapse in his grammar—an unusual one with Reuben, who generally kept too strict a watch over himself to be guilty of any such solecism. He coughed as if he were aware of the mistake directly he uttered it, and Godfrey hated himself for colouring to the roots of his hair, and becoming suddenly uncomfortably conscious of the presence of two tall footmen who handed the breakfast dishes, and who seemed to him most unnecessary appendages to the formality of the meal.

"Thanks, I prefer something simpler," he said, as he declined an elaborate dish prepared by the French cook. "They are pretty enough," he said a little coldly to his father, in the same breath, "but I must say I like the plain things. I don't call them rubbish."

"As you like a plain egg," said Reuben, trying to laugh, "I like it myself."

"Ah! that's the bore of all these luxuries—we cease to relish them," muttered Godfrey.

The big room, which was far too big for two men to take their meals in, was a nuisance to him as the rich food was, which Reuben disliked himself, but had had prepared to suit the dainty appetite of his son. Neither could Godfrey praise the pictures which his father had purchased at great cost. The fault might be in the purchaser, but the ambitious historical canvases themselves seemed to prove to the young man how sadly we as a nation had fallen from pictorial art of the highest kind, stringing up our taste to concert-pitch, and too often sounding the key-note while we are unable to get at the tune.

With the furniture it fared no better, and here Godfrey was outspoken.

"I hate machine-made work. Symmetry, yes, but manufacture of things of this sort is destructive—fatal to art. I would give more for a little bit of work, real and true like it was in the good old times, coming out of the carver's brain."

Reuben began to feel that matters were again going wrong between them.

"You can't make men all o' one build and height," he tried to say, reassuringly, to himself. He reflected that he could part with the furniture and purchase new, and that he had known it was not "properly faded-like" all along, whilst his son was brooding over the hideous arsenic greens and magenta dyes, and the wretched decorative sham art of the richer middle class.

What was the matter? Reuben Sellwood did not exactly know. And Godfrey, who had often lamented his loneliness and his want of any near relations, reproached himself for not taking everything in better part.

It was not his fault that he was artistic, liking everything that was pleasing to the moral rather than the physical palate, and that he had an involuntary recoil from all that was coarse and trifling. His artistic nature could find plenty of food in studying the moors, the river, and the trees. He was easily disgusted at his own amateur efforts in oil or water-colour, and concluded that he had not been endowed with any creative power. But this morning, partly from the want of anything better to do, and partly from the revulsion of feeling which had made him shrink from the unspeakable ugliness of the few gaudy landscapes which had been painted expressly to meet the demand of cotton-spinners at an English manufacturing town, he drew his sketch-book out of his pocket and commenced jotting down pencil notes.

So his father found him a few hours afterwards, with his dreamy eyes turned towards the shadowy moor, just where the gray turrets of the old Hall could be seen against the softer gray sky, towering over the green woods which nestled beneath it.

"It is beautiful," said the young man, desisting from his task, but too intent upon the view to notice the slight shadow which flitted across Reuben's face.

"*What* is beautiful?" asked the elder man, a little grudgingly.

"Why, the old Hall, with its picturesque turrets, and its curious mixture of architecture—in every way delightful. Who would think that there could be anything so extraordinarily beautiful in the process of decay, in the many-coloured mosses, and the varying tints on those walls which are mouldering with age."

"Ah, you would like to possess it?"

The light, which had been growing brighter in the young man's face, faded a little as he continued :

"I can admire without possessing. The place must be full of memories. Think of the many who must have lived and died in it."

"A queer reason for liking it. I should like the doghole to belong to you, and then, when it got too narrow for you, I would have you build on it a palace that should rival any place in New York. *I hate the place,*" Reuben continued, thinking of the spindle-legged tables, the worm-eaten oak-furniture, and the moth-riddled tapestry, which he had despised as only fit for an old Jew shop on one occasion when he had been admitted to write a business message when the master of Rashleigh had not been at home.

"Well, tastes differ, you see, and, as I am never likely to possess it, we needn't quarrel over it. To my mind there is

something stately in old age," continued the young man, warming to his topic, and making up his mind not to let his father's odd ways seem repugnant to him, and never to be repelled by his strange words. "Now, if there is any sort of fetishism which I could tolerate, it would be the worship of antiquities. What sort of people live in that house? Couldn't we get to know them? Are they as antique as their belongings?"

He looked more like the radiant young Apollo which his father wished him to resemble than he had looked at all since he came to Broadmeads as he asked the question, with fun dancing in his eyes.

"What sort of people?" repeated Reuben, with one of those sudden flashes of passion which proved a safety-valve for the pent-up forces within him. "The man who owns it is a contemptible fool."

Godfrey arched his brows.

"Then of course you don't know him. That would be hardly a kind or flattering way in which to speak of a friend," he added, beneath his breath, deciding that his father might be classified amongst the professors of strong language.

"*I know him!* Ah! just for my own convenience," answered Reuben, as his son stood motionless and perplexed. "It is to serve my own purposes that I know him."

If Reuben's lips were compressed ironically, and if he indulged in a sarcastic smile, it was an aside to himself. The moustache disguised the mouth, but the look on the upper part of the man's face disconcerted his son. It was as if he strove for speech as he laid his hand on his son's arm, and said at last, as the words came slowly, "I will tell you a secret; do not talk about it—though, if things go on as they are, it will pretty soon be an open secret," added Reuben, his voice shaken with some emotion which seemed to be difficult to control. "You admire the place—in time it will be yours."

"Good heavens! does there happen to be some curse about me that, immediately I look at anything, I must be told it is mine?" thought Godfrey, half fearful of the detaining arm, the eyes that glittered strangely as they looked into his face, and the breath, ordinarily so quiet, which now came in quick gasps. Aloud he said: "You must be joking. Do you think I have the evil eye, that I covet everything? I was only admiring the colours of the old building, which time and weather seem to have arranged with about as much intention as a bird has when it chooses the mosses for its nest. God forbid that I or any one should wish to pilfer the nest."

So determined was he to treat the whole thing as a delusion, that Reuben—if he had been ready with a confidence—drew again into his shell.

"We resemble each other very little," murmured the older man, in disappointment, as he took the younger one to look at the different points of interest in his grounds.

"It is very big, certainly; but that part of it is too new. I like things a little untidy, overgrown—don't you think so?"

"Newness is like youth, my boy—a fault that's mended in time."

"That's true; but there is the lake, with the overhanging trees, where the wild-flowers grow. I call that really beautiful," answered Godfrey, cordially.

"The lake—it is a fever-bed. I mean to have it drained."

"Really! It does not look as if there was anything malarious about it."

"It used to belong to the Rashleighs, with a ghost's walk, and all the rest of it, and is in a wretched state, like everything that belonged to them. Cleared out it must be, and as quickly as possible. I mean to have a landscape gardener down from London. A large sheet o' clear water, rockeries, and asphalte."

"Do you mean to say that you would do away with the bulrushes and forget-me-nots, and all those charming grasses?"

"What, the weeds!" cried Reuben in utter astonishment. "In the conservatory you can have fine growths of——"

"I know—of all sorts of hothouse beauties, from the azalea to the rarest orchis, and they *are* fine ones," said Godfrey a little sadly, "they do to look at in a drawing-room or under glass, but do you really think I care for those cultivated beauties so much as for a tangled growth of the good old English wild-flowers? Father, you must get it out of your head that I am at all ambitious. If the doctors tell you to drain the lake, do so if necessary, but for *my* sake you need not change it. I like it better as it is. And I would respect the feelings of the Rashleighs. It is easier to demolish a family ghost than to restore it."

Again Reuben bit his lip.

"Acknowledge," he said, "that, after all I have done for you, you only despise me for it, and look down upon my way o' doing it."

"On the contrary, I try to understand what you like."

CHAPTER V.

LOVE founded on duty—on the natural obligations arising out of the ties of blood and of nature—is not for that reason less necessary to be based on real sympathy and regard. It is a mockery to wear a fair outside show to meet the claims of a social ritual, while the inner harmony of the affections is wanting.

Godfrey found himself thinking something of this kind when the question occurred to him day after day of how it would be possible for him to make his father understand the sort of life which it seemed to him would be tolerable at Broadmeads. Gifted with a strong religious tendency, so that actual negation was distasteful to him, the lad found himself constantly moved to indignation, bordering on disgust, by the expressions of cynicism which seemed to him little less than blasphemous. There were utterances to which Reuben gave vent only in the presence of his son. How could Godfrey tell his father that he saw and resented the satiric intention with which these speeches were barbed, and that it seemed to him occasionally as if the words betrayed inconceivable heartlessness? And how could Reuben tell Godfrey that he considered his self-communings to be ridiculous, and that his son's meaningless scruples roused his risibility.

The men were so divided from each other in spirit that an outsider might have indulged in hilarity at the absurdity, and the utter hopelessness of their attempting to understand one another. Reuben had at times a faint and somewhat sorrowful perception of the fact that there was a far-away look in his son's eyes, as if he were miles away from him. For there were a thousand ideas and sensations familiar to Godfrey at which Reuben would have sneered had he attempted to speak of them.

As to the older man's own religion, Fichte might have said of it, *das gar nicht existirte*. But though he prided himself on the possession of a certain number of ideas to which he adhered with the tenacity of a genius in business—driven like hard nails into his granite head—he was secretly pleased to feel himself eclipsed by the more brilliant qualities of the youth. It even struck him as quite the proper thing that Godfrey should devote a certain portion of his time to the study of church music. All such fancies would have been antipathetic to Reuben; but then he had an undefined idea that

benevolent schemes and religious theories were somehow characteristic of the upper stratum of society, and that to take a part in these unpractical notions would fit the piece of Parian marble which he prided himself on having produced, for taking its place on an upper shelf where it could be regarded with admiration. Yet his pride in the superiority of the article which he had turned out did not make him patient with some of the new and startling opinions on the most burning political questions of the day, which came naturally to a young combatant fresh from an atmosphere of keen debate.

The older man, who had been almost denationalised by long expatriation, did not trouble himself to fight under any particular political banner, or to help in the solution of any of these questions. Yet he winced when Godfrey exclaimed, one morning :

"Yes, we are of the people. I am proud of belonging to the people. I have a better excuse for loving them and working for them because I belong to them."

Sheer astonishment seemed to take away Reuben's breath. He stared in utter amazement as his son continued :

"You know I do not care to be a large landowner ; but, if I am to have responsibilities of this kind by-and-by, the sooner I get some sort of knowledge about farming the better."

Reuben's face was an utter blank for the next few moments. His jaw dropped as he was slowly taking in the idea, that—whilst he, with all the partiality of a mother, had been bent on raising his son, and priding himself on his completeness in education, appearance, and demeanour—the lad was determined to depreciate his own market value.

"Humbug!" he said impatiently. "They are some o' them—these others—born in the mud and doomed to live in the mud—like reptiles as relish the shiny ooze and can't wriggle their tails out o' it. But *you*—to talk like that—why, I slaved and toiled for you or ever you were born—and you to talk of yourself as if you were a common farmer."

"Ah, I have no doubt. One can see that some strong desire must have acted upon you to make you work with a dozen times the energy of the average man. The energy was admirable—I envy it. But I reproach myself for letting you work in such a way for me."

"Why not? There are two classes of chaps—the chaps who work and the chaps who don't work, but just sit down and sun themselves like kings. I always intended ye to belong to the idle uns."

"Thanks," said Godfrey, repressing his inclination to betray his scorn. (It seemed to him impossible to conceive anything

much more prosaic or contemptible than the *rôle* which his father had so kindly assigned to him.) "I fear the toiling has hitherto been on one side. I was just telling you that I reproached myself for leaving St. Anne's in something very like ill-favour, because I had done none of the things which were expected of me——"

"A fact to be proud of," said Reuben, slapping him on the back. "I sent you there to be amongst gentlemen, not to be drenched with learning. A vicious thing that cramming—your Shakespeare and Burns didn't cram. Why, the ancients were for drawing out a man, and the moderns all for putting into him. I heard that sayin' when I was a boy, but I had precious little Greek and Latin to spoil my English."

"That's true. I was going on to say that I didn't take a sufficiently good degree to go to the Bar, and I should not like the responsibility of being a doctor, but that—I ought not to lie quite fallow, and leave you all the laurels. It strikes me that I might do something to help you in business which you leave to stewards. Other men have taken up the vexed question of how to help the working classes."

"As how?" demanded Reuben, lapsing into the vernacular.

"Well, you tell me I shall probably be a landed proprietor some day."

"A precious large one," answered Reuben, with glittering eyes.

"A landed proprietor should know something of agricultural progress. He should have a scientific training which even now it may be possible for me to get. Sometimes I think that if we had consulted over this before, if I had not been too young to properly understand it, we should both have decided that the University was not exactly the place for me to gain my experience. Why, look at the amount of probation which is required for either of the learned professions, and yet, of all human occupations, the one that stands most in need of the safeguards of training and skill is that of tilling the ground and feeding cattle."

He did not intend his sentence to end in bathos, as he felt it had; nor that his father should stand stock still and look at him as if he were a fit inmate for a lunatic asylum. In default of any other answer, Reuben Sellwood began to laugh.

"Stick to your club, my boy, and your music and kickshaws. Some of us were born to be the working-bees, and the rest to be worked for and sit quiet."

"The club may be all very well in its way; I am for the free expression and ventilation of opinion," muttered Godfrey to himself, as a vision floated before his eyes of the highly

respectable Tarringmoor Club to which he had just been duly elected, with all its wonderfully fine decorations, and the newspapers—dailies, weeklies, and monthlies—with what they said repeated in a heavier way by the quarterlies. "I should like to have a free library in Tarringmoor, and a lecture-room for working-men," he said, aloud; "the sooner we get them the better."

It is doubtful what Reuben's answer might have been, for at that moment the conversation was interrupted by cries of distress, and at a little distance one of the gardeners could be seen, apparently out of breath, and dragging a terror-stricken, ragged urchin, who had been trespassing on the property, and who held something huddled up in a basket close to his face.

The boy was followed by a tiny, round-eyed, wide-mouthed girl, who trotted after him as rapidly as her legs could carry her, and who was howling as loudly as her lungs would allow her to howl. Both children had a wretched, ill-fed appearance, with shrivelled skins and thin limbs, instead of being healthy country children.

"I tell my gardeners to frighten the brats when they find 'em trespassing here," said Reuben, in explanation to Godfrey, to whom the sight seemed to have given a shock, as if he were roused out of his usual listlessness by a discord which came into sharp collision with his theories about the future, and his dream-world.

"I thought I understood you to say," he faltered, in a low voice, as he placed his hand on his father's arm, "that—this place would belong to me—some day?"

"Well, what of that?"

"It's nonsense about the place really belonging to me, if the poor man can have no right of way in it. And look—he has been filling his basket with nothing but a few harmless flowers; perhaps there is a sick mother at home, and he wants to cheer her with them. It is not such a very terrible offence."

A flash of expression lit Reuben's usually impassive face, which was gone as instantly as it appeared. Was it a revelation of something concealed even from his son—the same "something" which made Godfrey often wonder why a chance word or look should make his father fire-up when there seemed to be nothing to offend him?

"Eh?" he asked, as if to gain time to cover his confusion, and conscious of the altered tone in his own voice. "I told the gardeners to make an exception if ever a poor brat wanted a flower. Eh? but don't you think I am a d—d fool to be so weak about flowers? There were folks in my day who

would have belaboured that young un till he could scarcely stand—it was scant mercy *then*. All they wanted was to rid the world of such vermin, and then pretend they had performed a service to humanity. I knew a boy once——” he commenced, looking before him as if he had forgotten the presence of his son. And then he suddenly pulled himself up as if he had changed his mind about repeating a story.

“What were you going to tell me? You knew a boy once——?” said Godfrey, after a pause, in a puzzled undertone.

“Nothing. I shouldn’t think of boring you with an idle story. Tales do for old women,” he said, looking after the retreating child, who was making good his escape.

“Ah, to be sure,” answered his son, with that wideness of assent which relieved him from the necessity of pressing for further details. He stood stroking his upper lip, deep in thought, while he watched his father’s face with a curious mixture of fanciful speculation—consisting at once of attraction and repulsion, fear and pity, trust and distrust—and the sense of something like a shadow falling on him as he stood in the sunlight.

He drew a long breath as he asked himself:

“What could the antecedents have been which led to that expression on my father’s face, something like the look of a fag turned into a bully?”

It was true that there was a widening gulf of silence and unsociability opening more and more between them. Reuben’s secrets, whatever they might be, were locked and double-locked in his own breast, and Godfrey had no cabalistic spell.

Neither of the two was communicative. Reuben gave instructions to the gardeners to let the child be free of the place and help himself to a few flowers, much to their astonishment; and Godfrey, knowing nothing of Reuben’s queer fit of indulgence, made a point of finding out the name of the boy and visiting him at his own cottage to give him a present of money. It was Godfrey’s first experience of the miserable state of the peasantry in that part of——shire. But he became less interested in mediæval details and in sketching the scenery of the neighbourhood and the artistic contours of the Hall, now that he awoke to the fact of Reuben’s tyranny.

“If flunkeydom is worse than swelldom, surely plutocracy is more insufferable than aristocracy,” thought the young man, with a shiver to himself.

For many of his father’s notions were absurd and superannuated, and yet—as familiarity without much expansion

increased by degrees on either side—it became daily more evident that Reuben could not bear a syllable of contradiction. Though he knew little about politics, he would have liked to have had to settle Ireland or any given number of countries in his own way, but his measures would have been drastic. He was acutely conscious of the deficiencies of those untrained masses of the people, from whom he boasted he had risen. He adopted a style of conviction on all possible subjects which was galling to the younger and more impulsive mind of his son—a conviction too pronounced for the trimming of practical politics. He had tested his own faculties in a varied school, and had a contempt for those of his neighbours. He had no charitable tolerance for contrary beings, and no rhetorical blandishments to deck the sternness of his views.

“This chap of mine will be riding a hobby to death,” he said, when Godfrey propounded a few of those notions which his father considered to be utterly subversive and destructive to society. “I don’t want to encourage paupers, vaunting their rags and sores, but the men who can raise themselves. If there was any of the right sort of stuff in them, they would cease to be paupers. Wait till you are a public man before you take up these sort of questions.”

“I don’t want to be a public man,” laughed Godfrey in reply. “What is it to be a public man? To run a chance of having your name placarded against a wall and bespattered with abuse in a daily paper, to have to meet your greatest enemy at a dinner, or hear yourself railed at by your opposite neighbour in a railway carriage. No, I prefer to do things in a smaller way.”

And then he attempted in vain to speak to his father of failing harvests, and the heavy losses of the poorer people.

“There are some landlords who pay more attention to their partridges than their fellow-men, but *you* at least should know better,” he tried to say.

The words had little effect upon Reuben, but unconsciously he was softened. Perhaps it was the effect of Godfrey’s violin music, with its infinite variety of passion and pathos, which Reuben had always professed to scorn, but to which he had listened lately, unknown to the performer, in an adjacent room.

Godfrey thought little of his own performance as that of an amateur. But the instrument formed a vent for the passionate artistic fervour which the younger man concealed as a rule from others, and combined with other ideas of his own which were often unformed. He could scarcely have existed himself without music. But he would have wondered greatly if he could have known that when he sang a favourite song from

Handel's "Samson" his father's attention was singularly arrested.

"Honour and arms scorn such a foe,"

Reuben hummed, in imitation of Godfrey's bass runs and trills, when he was alone,

"Though I could end thee at a blow,
Poor victory !

Vanquish a foe that is half slain,
So mean a triumph I disdain."

How was it that Reuben could not get this special stanza out of his head? "Poor victory !" It rang in his ears in the intervals of his sleep. It haunted him when he looked at the turrets of the Hall.

"Honour and arms scorn such a foe,
Poor victory !

To conquer thee,
Or glory in thine overthrow."

"Ah, I have it," he said to himself one morning, when, at the sight of a youthful figure in deep mourning flitting up the avenue of beech-trees which led into Rashleigh Park, a whimsical solution occurred to him of his difficulty. "I shall triumph still—and yet the sleeping dogs will be let lie."

CHAPTER VI.

IN process of time the two neighbours became acquainted. The acquaintance was in fact inevitable, as their grounds adjoined each other, and it became necessary that certain little matters should be settled which were from time to time cropping up, and which Sir Ralph was not rich enough to be able to entrust, as he otherwise might have done, to the management of a solicitor.

There was a picturesque little wooden bridge joining the two estates, which Reuben with characteristic effrontery had

ordered to be pulled down. The estates still remained "two" in the eyes of the world, especially as Reuben had commenced building the wall which he had threatened, regardless of the fact that the noise was annoying to the baronet. Yet it was an open secret that the large number of mortgages on the Rashleigh demesne had somehow fallen into the hands of the interloper who had purchased the place vulgarly called Broadmeads, with a Philistine smack about its title.

But a portion of the old property was still intact. And, when it became a nice question of law as to whether the new-comer could claim a right of way for himself and for his people over the somewhat venerable bridge, it seemed the easiest way of settling the matter to order the bridge—that stood on the portion of ground which Reuben had purchased, but which his servants might not use without so much discord—to be pulled down. It was removed in the dead of the night by Reuben's orders, and there were tears of resentment and fury in the baronet's eyes as he recognised his inability to punish the offender. For, whenever it was possible to adopt a high-handed course, the owner of Broadmeads did so. A direct appeal to him would have been useless, had the baronet been able to conquer his pride sufficiently to make it.

Yet in the course of the dispute, which was conducted with as little outward show of antagonism as possible, the two men met for the first time, Sir Ralph, with circles round his eyes and wrinkles caused by anxiety, apparently the elder of the two.

He—having led a retired life, and having thought it right, early in his career, to make a sort of protest by relinquishing the hunting-field and other healthful pursuits of which his father had been so fond—had become more or less a valetudinarian. His aquiline-featured, clean-shaven face was never free from the pallor of sickliness, and he looked with some secret envy at the better-braced and more muscular frame of the stranger. Ralph—who was unsocial even to people of his own rank, and who was accustomed to look down on anything which took the form of exchange and barter—in his heart cursed the fate that obliged him to condescend to have business talks with his neighbour, or that disturbed the peaceful life in which, previous to the death of his father, he had been more or less successful in keeping disagreeable facts from his recollections.

Sir Ralph was, as the people of Tarringmoor expressed it, a "high-tempered" man. His father had been high-tempered before him, and it was somehow considered that to be high-tempered savoured of aristocracy. The temper, in this case, extended itself even to the beautiful collie-dog which constantly

accompanied Sir Ralph, and which had the family habit of barking at people whom his master did not favour. The meeting with such a fellow as Reuben Sellwood—who seemed to be the visible embodiment of all his troubles, and whose very presence interfered with Sir Ralph's sedulous avoidance of anything like exposure of the family vicissitudes which might come before the public—could not fail to be annoying to Ralph.

He had still the house and many acres of fine pasture-land to fall back upon, but the very appearance of this wily neighbour, who had established himself so close to him that he might continually sting him like a gadfly, was a reminder that a large part of the old property had been sold, and that the mansion which had been named by the ridiculous title of "Broadmeads"—as if those who built it had gloried in their prosperity—was actually built upon the land which had belonged for centuries to his forefathers. Sir Ralph's proud and distinguished head—well poised on his shoulders—was held a little more stiffly than usual, in spite of his delicate health, when he met the plebeian.

Reuben laughed in his sleeve. What did the other man's petty pretences signify? Plebeian as he was, he had already become his creditor. He already possessed three quarters of the land which had originally been owned by the Rashleighs, and he had sworn to become possessor of the other quarter.

The interview was an amusing one. It was a case of Greek meeting Greek. If Sir Ralph was proud, his antagonist was equally so, and, though it was easy to condemn the latter as a "born cad," it appeared that cads were no more free than aristocrats from the "glorious fault of angels and of gods." It would have been better policy for Sir Ralph to restrain that "high temper" which was reputed to be an equally glorious heritage handed down to him from a long line of ancestors. He made many, but somewhat ineffectual, efforts to do so. For Reuben's blue eyes were cold as steel, expressing the strength of a will against which the other man's passionate insolence would prove weak as clouds of spray perpetually dashing themselves against an iron coast.

He spoke little, availing himself on these occasions of a certain number of formulas which he had become accustomed to repeat. He uttered them in a deep voice, with a careful, monotonous intonation, guarding against too great a freedom of speech, and keeping his adversary at a distance.

In every respect Reuben had the best of it. One might have said that he—having become used to restraining his own temper for his own purposes—betrayed more than once by a humorous twinkle of the eye his consciousness that the more irritable baronet was proving, by this very evident manifesta-

tion of the old Adam from which he had sprung, his knowledge that both were, after all, descended from a common stock.

By degrees Sir Ralph grew less irascible as the other proved a skilful strategist. Everything which Reuben answered seemed perfectly natural, except a chance expression to which he gave utterance, as both men stood together in the grounds of Rashleigh Park where their appointment had been made, Sir Ralph being determined on this occasion not to invite the new-comer to walk into his house.

"It used not to have so much moss about it, surely," Reuben had said, as he gazed at the old gray pile of buildings which looked picturesque and beautiful as in a fairy-tale in the evening light, with its stones stained by lichen and rain into every variety of tint.

"Used not to?" asked Ralph, looking at him sharply. "I did not know you had ever seen it before."

"One would think I had seen it before," answered Reuben, righting himself instantly; "but the fact is, since I have come back to the old country, I have had a hankering after old buildings of this sort, and, when you have seen one, it is like seeing a lot of them."

"Oh! I heard you caught at the adjoining estate directly it was put up to auction. A man of your sort can appreciate the historical interest belonging to places of this sort," answered Sir Ralph, a little mollified.

Reuben nodded.

"Well, and you have also a geometric eye, and your own theory about natural frontiers; but I shall keep what came to me from my ancestors."

"It was not my fault; the theory was—I had the best advice—Mr.——"

"I can do without lawyers."

"I also. Lawyers are not much in my way. I am a square man, and I only get on with people who are square like myself. Peace is the best thing in the world, still to have peace I must first establish my rights," said Reuben, firmly.

The baronet winced. Here was a man outspoken, but not so vulgar as he had anticipated, a man who was so uncommunicative that no one knew the full extent of his fortune; a man who had him to a certain extent in his power, but whose actions might be less hard than his threats. Square enough he looked, without the appearance of being fagged-out—whatever he had gone through in his life—with shoulders big enough to carry the Alps, if not the world. Whilst Sir Ralph himself had felt for a long time as if the machine were wearing out, and began to require rest. Might it not be to his interest to conciliate the unknown Atlas?

"It's a fine old place—none better in the country," he said, with a sigh, and yet with that sort of secret satisfaction which a man always has when he hears a thing praised that is nearest to his heart.

"Humph!" answered Reuben, speaking a little slowly, as if he were well aware that the sting of each of his words would penetrate through the armour in which the aristocrat had encased himself—"requires a lot of money to keep it up, so I've heard say. That's the worst of these old places."

Sir Ralph drew himself up; but that his sensitive pride had been wounded was proved by his face changing colour. He shut himself in too continually with his books and the old pictures to have any mask of sunburn like that which Reuben had brought from over the seas, to help him to dissemble his emotions.

It was one of Sellwood's maxims to abstain from pushing a triumph to its utmost, and never to gather grapes till they were ripe. But on this occasion the temptation of regularly rousing the temper of the other, who prided himself on his dignity, proved to be too much for him.

And, as if it was pleasant to see that his neighbour winced, he continued:

"You should go over to America or New Zealand, you people whose fortunes in the Old Country are going to rags. You could lead a patriarchal life there, feeding your sheep and oxen. No come-down in that."

Sir Ralph's unwholesome-looking complexion was pink like that of a woman at what he supposed to be the coarseness of the taunt. If the baronet could have given orders to his butler (one man-servant with that title—a sort of survival of grandeur—had sufficed since Sir George's death to clean the boots, and do work of all sorts except that which fell to the coachman and gardener) to kick the fellow out of his grounds, his rage would scarcely have been satisfied. But, in the midst of his ire, he was forced to remember that he was in this wretch's power, and that to be summoned by him for assault, to say nothing of worse possibilities, would not improve matters with the people at Tarringmoor. He made a feeble attempt at meeting him with what he supposed to be his own weapons, and said, with an unamiable smile:

"Certainly—no come-down in that, if, as report says, Tarringmoor ought to be pleased to acknowledge that—that you——"

"I know that all sorts of reports are about; but by what right, sir," asked Reuben, apparently not discomposed—for, to do him justice, he had intended no allusion to injure Sir Ralph's self-respect—"by what right do people meddle with what I do not care to reveal?"

"And by what right," roared the baronet, "do people venture to discuss my private affairs? You and your financial successes are nothing to me. It is a sheer piece of impertinence for any one to venture to allude to my difficulties."

Again the mask of sunburn, with which kindly Nature still veiled Reuben's countenance, stood him in good stead, as, making a greater effort to conceal the testiness which might otherwise have betrayed itself in his voice, he answered, with a shrug :

"Ah, as to that I meant to make a suggestion which might stand you in good stead. I thought with the free air around us we might talk like men. Prejudices you must have—you have a lot of them no doubt—but my right is as clear as possible, and I might have been able to put something before you which would have been to your advantage, still——"

He broke off with a meaning shrug, as if—though it was about the longest speech which he had been known to make since he came to Broadmeads—it was not in his power to make it longer.

The shrug, however, was better than rhetoric, and the manner in which he turned on his heel, leaving the fuming baronet to admit that he had made a fool of himself, more eloquent still.

"So the jackass thought I was going to pour out the story of my life into his long ears," he chuckled to himself, as he reached his own grounds, "not so fast; perhaps, when our interests are identical, he may hear a good deal which will make his ass's ears tingle."

CHAPTER VII.

JUNE roses were blowing on the walls of the cottages at Tarringmoor. Tall white lilies with golden centres and waxen petals were growing in the cottage gardens, in singular contrast with the blazing ribbon-like adornment of the bedding-out system which had been adopted in the conventional flower-beds at Broadmeads, whilst beyond on the blue moor the river rippled merrily over the mossy stones. Cattle were grazing in the lowlands, and labourers were slouching home from their

work in the evening light, as Reuben—who in his secret heart cared no more than Godfrey for the buhl cabinets, inlaid tables, tall mirrors, and elaborate curtains with which the upholsterer had told him it was proper to adorn his new house—crept out into the lanes and fields which surrounded his park.

The sun was setting in clouds of purple and amethyst as Reuben left behind him the great iron gates. Absorbed in his own thoughts, and feeling no necessity when he found himself alone for keeping up that appearance of stolidity which he did not generally allow himself to drop even in the presence of his son, the man hurried along, his head bent upon his shoulders, and his eyes cast down. Now and then he glanced at the wild flowers, which seemed mysteriously to bring back the dead past, and to be associated in an odd way with that which he tried to think was the triumphant and prosperous present. There was the "gypsy rose," the "ragged robin," the "clematis," the "moon daisy," the "monkshood," and there the blossoms were just coming into bud which he remembered used to be vulgarly called "kiss-me-quick." It was astonishing how much in his secret heart he agreed with his son in preferring these simple things with the good old-fashioned names to all the wonders accomplished by horticultural art which he had left behind him at Broadmeads.

The sunset, though beautiful in colour, had been stormy, and now the clouds increased and rain was threatening. The wind began to blow coldly over the desolate moor, but the wind was not more bitter than his own miserable thoughts, much as he was inclined to take praise to himself for the new scheme suggested to him by Handel's music—a compromise which would still allow him to keep up the unforgiving spirit that could not dwell with love. He was bitter at the acknowledgment which he was compelled to make to himself, that regions and regions of separate existence—with ideas that he could not fathom, and motives which he had no means of proving—lay between him and the only creature on earth for whom he cared.

He was inclined to curse the fate which brought his boy no nearer to him in reality—for, though the lad might prove too dutiful to leave him, there was always an uncomfortable gulf between them. It did not occur to him to reflect that an abyss of black nothingness, from which he might shrink back appalled could it be revealed to him, lay yet between his own spirit and that of the Eternal Father. Strange thoughts were stirring in him, born possibly of that music which reveals yearnings so little understood in the hearts of the worst of us. And Reuben did not consider himself by any means the worst. He prided himself on his heroic

endurance, on the fact that through a course of years he had grown a hard skin over wounds on which, at Godfrey's age, he would not have been able to endure a touch. Misfortune had been to him, as it is to many of us, no sweetener of the temper. He had passed through terrible suffering—all the more terrible that it had been quiet; but it had left its mark upon him. Few would have guessed that he had been through any ordeal. The people who met him in an ordinary way respected him as a reticent, but keen, business man, whose opinion on many subjects might be valuable, but credited him with no sentiment beyond a recollection of his adventures.

"I care about as much for the lot of 'em as I cared about the opossums," he said, with a bitter laugh, when he met any of these people, telling himself for the hundredth time that he hated his own kind, and that the exception in Godfrey's case was because the boy was all his own—flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone—and yet, by some cruel trick of Fate, in heart and brain divided from him.

"I'll meet Sir Ralph in his own way; I couldn't propose to him the other thing. After all, perhaps it 'ud be, as the music said, a poorish victory," he thought, as he found his way, as if by instinct in the fading light, to the path over the heath which led to Torringmoor.

Much of the way was bare 'and lonely, with no stars to illumine it, and only a vaporous, watery-looking moon gazing down upon him, with pale, cold face, as he sauntered on. He loitered once by the river, where the perfume of the meadow-sweet and the penny-royal seemed to bring back some of those recollections which are so strangely associated with the sense of smell. And then, with a muttered curse at his own absurdity, he hurried on till he came to a little ruined cottage closely adjoining the moor, and not more than a mile from the gates of his estate. A funny old cottage, which was a very unenlivening sight, naked and miserable, but with traces of former occupation still to be seen in a poor little iron gate which swung open by the ruined wall, and was half eaten through with rust. More than one visitor to Torringmoor had asked why they did not pull it down, and begin building on the site a line of villas—as had been proposed by one of the more stirring inhabitants of the place. But there it stood, windowless and doorless, with the four winds of heaven blowing through its broken thatch, and birds building their nests in one corner of the broken chimney.

A town-councillor who was asked to account for this eyesore generally laughed and shrugged his shoulders. If it pleased that lavish gentleman who had come to live at Broadmeads to offer a sum which would almost beggar other people

for "this bit of a ruined barn," just as folks were intending to put up the land for auction, it was really, as he answered, "no business of his;" the new owner of Broadmeads had either lost his head in his covetousness for every spare bit of land which he seemed to make a rule of buying up, or he wished to astonish folks with one of the showy vagaries of a millionaire. All that the Broadmeads Town-Council knew was that one day they received a letter from Reuben Sellwood, saying that, as his son was a "bit of an amateur artist," and had a fancy for sketching all sorts of queer places, he would buy up the cottage and the piece of land on which it stood. Of course they asked a "fancy" price, which Mr. Sellwood readily paid. He never said anything more about it, but the good people of Tarringmoor would certainly have thought he was crazed if they could have known that he came pretty often to gaze at the cranky thing by moonlight.

They would have said, as you, my good, critical reader, will probably say, that it was not consistent with character. But the perfect consistency of a "character rôle" to borrow an expression from our Continental neighbours—is somehow the rarest thing in the world. If an outsider can predicate the actions of nine people out of ten, he is likely to be utterly at sea when he comes to the tenth. I do not pretend to moralise on this infinite variety of human nature.

But whatever of tenderness, pathos, sin, or suffering lay in the past history of this man—who had so far succeeded in eradicating from his heart the mystery which lies hid in all of us, that he was classed amongst the most prosaic of the matter-of-fact—welled up in his memory and imagination now. He seemed to hear again the song of the nightingale which had once come to soothe the agony of a weary sufferer on a bed of pain, and must have chanted from some trees that once grew on the very spot on which he stood.

No twitter of birds disturbed the solitude now. It was as quiet as if pains, toils, and passions had never been enacted in it,—quiet as the burying-ground of the poor which Reuben visited as stealthily afterwards, where a mound, no longer distinguishable from those which surrounded it, might have reminded him of the pathetic ending of all heart-burnings, revenges, and sorrows. But Reuben gained nothing from the story of rest which might have been preached to him by that mouldering earth. He was thinking again of his son who was so superior to the common ruck of men—he must be careful not to jar on him. But the plan which he had to propose was no cruel one—it was benevolent—it would approve itself to every one, he told himself, as he returned by the familiar paths past the gorse and the heather, and past the quietly rippling

river to the roadside, where the great laurel-trees which he had planted on his own estate, backed by a fir-plantation, loomed darkly in the night air.

"There is no time like the present. I shall catch him in now, and if any soul on earth has a right to tackle him, I have," he had been saying to himself more than once, as he had been walking across the heath.

He had hitherto been too skilful a strategist to intrude himself on Sir Ralph's solitude. But matters had come to a crisis now, and he smiled grimly to himself as he walked on a little further, and handed in what he scornfully called his "nonsensical pasteboard" to the shabbily-dressed butler at Rashleigh Hall. He knew perfectly well that this would be about the time when Sir Ralph would have finished his dinner, and when he would be sitting moodily over his wine—if indeed his circumstances had not compelled him to make a virtue of necessity, and join that teetotal movement which, as Reuben said cynically to himself, was now the cream of the fashion since so many bishops and grandees had joined it.

"Why, he may even run a chance of having his portrait figuring in the most popular reviews, and may take the chair as president at the what-d'ye-call-it—Social Science Congress, and all because he hadn't enough tin to spare for the stocking of his cellar," chuckled Reuben to himself, as the man-servant went in with his card, knowing perfectly well that—however his neighbour's intrusion might rouse Sir Ralph's temper—the latter would not dare to refuse himself to him. Had not the baronet been compelled to borrow the offered loan of his money, when creditors had pressed upon him so heavily, that the question of whether he should avail himself of the accommodation or not had been one which no longer brooked weighing in the balance?

The baronet's pride compelled him to allude to the circumstance as he invited in the unwelcome guest, who—in the softened light of the candles which left dark shadows in the great room—could not help admiring the old oak sideboard, carved with the arms of the Rashleigh family, and still seeming to tell of former splendours. It was in keeping with the equally old massive chairs, and the spare figure, with its worn face of somewhat ascetic expression, which sat, as Reuben had expected, alone at the head of the frugal board.

Reuben's eyes wandered to the corners of the ancient banquetting-room where there were still the faded tapestry and the damaged old family portraits. The place could have told secrets had it been in a communicative mood. He had heard descriptions of it by Mrs. Rose, though he had never

set foot in it before. What had become of the great china bowls which had been so long in the family, and which had apparently gone the way of all flesh, as if they had made up their minds that they had lived long enough? Had they gone the same way as the grand old clock which one of the Rashleighs was said to have brought from Bruges, with figures which used to come from hidden places and make their obeisances whenever an hour was struck? There was a pretence in the family that the new baronet's greyhound had knocked down many of the articles of *virtu*. Certainly they had vanished one by one, but it would have increased Sir Ralph's iciness, which was worse than his occasional fits of irritability, if Vere herself had dared to hint that he had been compelled to part with them.

This little fiction of maintaining the dignity of the family was perfectly understood by his niece. It kept her reticent, courageous, and accustomed to exert herself, forgetting herself in others, and ready to hide her own great unselfishness, which was ever present as a hidden force behind her restrained feelings.

"I was charmed to oblige ye with the loan that ye required," said Reuben, slowly, after he had gazed his fill, with a nod which contrasted somewhat oddly with the stiff, aristocratic bow.

"Without disobliging yourself?" Sir Ralph said, slowly. "My friend, if I judge you rightly, you are not the man to do things impulsively. You have some motive for parting with all this money? You are too shrewd a fellow to throw it away."

Sir Ralph, who had been brooding over the matter for some days, had at least as good a comprehension of Reuben's character as Reuben had himself.

"Oh, a good bargain pleases two people," answered the latter, in no way abashed; "I don't see why all this should make any difference 'twixt you and me."

His perfect self-assurance, and the easy way in which he added, "I don't see why you and me should quarrel," acted as a moral stiffener upon Sir Ralph, who, sitting bolt upright and speaking much as one of Holbein's portraits, if it had been suddenly transformed into life, might be expected to speak, said:

"Let us come to business! Do you propose to pay yourself by taking my whole estate?"

"To put it plainly, I don't see why our interests shouldn't run together."

Sir Ralph raised his eyebrows. To his way of thinking, there was but one line of demarcation in the world which signified very much—that between the man who had a grandfather and the man who had none. Now, so far as he had heard, the

impudent creditor who had forced himself into his presence had not even a father, and yet he had the cool insolence to speak of their interests as identical. Sir Ralph was a little afraid of the self-made man, nevertheless. Was he not in his power? And, though the sherry was poor enough which stood before him on the table, he was so far from openly resenting Reuben's speech that he said :

"A glass of wine with you——" adhering to an old custom.

"In real truth, I'm downright sorry for ye," said Reuben, a few moments afterwards, balancing the wine-glass, which he forced himself by way of compliment to empty, between his fingers, "but you *couldn't* tide over such difficulties. It wasn't *you* who got into them, but you found them made for you—that's the long and short of it."

"The situation was created for me," answered Sir Ralph, with a chilling smile.

It was evident that he was now fairly subdued in temper, and saw that there was nothing to be gained by recrimination.

"Yes, and I don't see how you can flounder out o' it. It'll take a deal to build up the fortunes of this house, but you will not find me a hard-fisted creditor. Indeed, on one consideration—but I don't know how exactly to expound it to ye."

"Proceed," said the baronet haughtily, "I am ready to listen.

"But I may shock your prejudices."

"Prejudices cost us dear. Poor people have no business with them."

"You have old-fashioned opinions."

"Do you think so? You may be mistaken, and opinions are not prejudices."

"According to my way of thinking, folks must move a little bit with the times. If you don't keep pace with them, you'll be left out o' the running."

"Ah, that's *your* system of ethics. I admit the altered conditions," said Sir Ralph, growing, if possible, more erect and poker-like, as he looked opposite at the rich man sitting on his easiest chair, boasting of his prospects, and repeating his crude theories. The state of things at Rashleigh must be altered indeed, or else it must all be a hideous nightmare.

"Good !"

Reuben's eyes gleamed. He was evidently labouring under some excitement which made his hand a little unsteady and his breathing audible.

"Good," he repeated. "I see it is possible we may agree better than I expected. Our interests, as I said, may end by being the same. I have money enough for both."

"If you have, you needn't brag about it," muttered Sir Ralph, a little huffily.

"No, I say share and share alike. I don't want to harm ye. Why shouldn't we be friends?" He dropped his voice—his agitation had evidently increased. "On *one* consideration it is possible I may defer all claim."

"And that?" said the baronet, whose heart was beating more loudly than he cared to admit.

"You have a niece like a Hebe" (Reuben pronounced it Heeb). "Now, why shouldn't she become the so-called 'angel' which every young woman may be to a young fellow fond o' poetry, just fresh from his University trainin', and why shouldn't the two together promise to look after the interests of your own little lass? Keep the estate together and share alike, no one the wiser."

The absolute pain which could no longer be concealed made it impossible for Sir Ralph to answer, as the full tide of recollection—of the ignominy of poverty, and the humiliation to which this niece, confided to his care in infancy, had already been subjected—rushed back upon him. He waved the impudent intruder into silence with a gesture that seemed to say, "Why do you profane my private griefs?"

But Reuben's ardour to propound his scheme and his consciousness that he himself had emerged from social twilight, and had passed—not only that shadowy line which, in the eyes of the Tarringmoor folk, divided the retail trader from the wholesale merchant, but the further line of demarcation which separated the wholesale merchant from the large capitalist—made him answer, with equal pride:

"And if I mention that I have a son, it will be fair to say that he in no way resembles myself, but is in appearance, education, breeding—in everything of which you could think—a fit match for the daughter of a queen."

The reserve and hauteur of the one man had been rivalled by the high tone adopted by the other. Yet Sir Ralph's hard breathing, and the way in which he stared at the speaker, seemed to intimate that Reuben had committed an offence for which it would be in vain to essay reparation. The drops of perspiration stood in beads upon the baronet's forehead. He had no great appreciation of the finer qualities of Vere's character, but as she was still his niece, and the daughter of the elder brother of the house, it had been an offence to mention her name in a talk like this. To think that the sight of Vere should have touched the heart of an old misogynist, for Reuben was a professed woman-hater, was in itself insufferable to him. Why had he not managed to

send the girl away from home: why should he be compelled to submit to such an indignity?

"Impossible," he said, when he was able to speak. "You do not even know my niece."

"Oh, don't trouble about that," answered Reuben, with a vague sense of disappointment in the cold scrutiny of the baronet's gaze. "I've heerd a lot o' the lass, and ha' had more than one peep at her, and it 'ud go against me if she was to be left unprovided for."

And he rubbed his hands together with a pleasant glow of generosity which was quite a new sensation to him.

Sir Ralph groaned. It was as if a bombshell had fallen at his feet. He had preserved his dignity sufficiently to prevent his start from being noticeable. But he was no longer erect and poker-like. His cheeks and brow were flushed.

"Disreputable!" he muttered, beneath his breath. And then, clutching his chair with both his hands, he smiled blandly into Reuben's face, recognising that the more he betrayed his mortification or showed any excitement of feeling the calmer would his inquisitor become, and the more inexorable in tightening the torture-screw.

"You had better think of it," he said, as he rose to leave. It seemed to him that the advantage of the proposal might be supposed to be on *his* side.

"Give me some days for reflection—the thing strikes me as so extraordinary—so foreign to our English customs. I think you have no right to propose anything of the kind. Why bring my niece's name into the question?"

"I wish her nothing but good. I wouldn't hurt a hair of her pretty head if it were ever so. It's not as if she'd have to marry my lad straight off the reel. Give 'em time, that's what I say; it's my belief they were made for each other."

Sir Ralph winced as if from a physical blow, and then remembered that ruin and misery, not to say starvation and humiliation, seemed to stare him in the face, and that the critical emergency could no longer be tided over.

"If only the man were a gentleman, and not such a horrible cad."

He shook hands with him, nevertheless, trying to master the indignation and astonishment which were still betrayed by his eyes.

"It means thousands—I might almost say millions. There are folk who talk against money—braying like asses a meaningless bray—when they forget all that it has done to benefit the human race. It means in this case that I shall be set free from the curse of my wearing anxieties—free to feel

the pure air of heaven blowing round me again without any of those carking cares," he said to himself, sitting still for hours after Reuben had left him.

Whilst Mr. Sellwood—well pleased with his evening's work, and with unruffled features which told of nothing that had taken place—had endured to be dismissed with a royal "Leave me," and was walking home with a conviction that his banishment could not last long.

CHAPTER VIII.

REUBEN was so little given to analysing his own thoughts that he could not calculate the effect of the announcement of his new project upon that much greater mystery—the mind of his son. Yet he was so pleased with himself when a satisfactory letter arrived a few days afterwards from Sir Ralph that he could not resist immediately beating about the bush by drawing the conversation confidentially in the direction of women, considerably to Godfrey's mystification. For, whatever weaknesses his father might have had in the past, he had always supposed him to be free from a tendency to foolish adulation of the fairer sex. Indeed, Reuben had more than once given him to understand that his own experiences amongst women had been singularly unfortunate, and that he had never known more than two in his whole life who were worth their salt, one of those, of course, being Godfrey's mother. He had seemed to have no heart for women, and did not wish his life to be brightened or adorned by them. He had more than once sarcastically repeated the talk of the Tarringmoor ladies, showing himself implacable to their gossiping ways, and declaring that English women were humbugging fools, and had too much leisure by half in which to abuse their neighbours.

"I'd set them to make shirts, or to scrub the floors; 'twould cure them o' tongue-wagging," said Reuben, with a fierceness which was singularly ungrateful, considering that more than one lady, with the recollection of the possibility of a second marriage for the rich man, had been courteous and condescending in her efforts to please. "Depend upon it," he had added cynically, "the whole pack of 'em are up to mischief with their

twaddle. Chatter, chatter, chitter, chitter, 'tis all the time, just as if a lot o' swallows were getting ready for their flight, when you have women-folk in the house."

Godfrey had never thought of asking where his father had swallowed his nauseous doses of experience, or whether this sad account was merely theoretical. If he had been consulted, he might have given his own opinion that the companionship of a good and noble woman was one of the most potent influences by which a man might "move upwards, working out the beast." But he had not cared to discuss the matter, and had been contented by the way in which Reuben always ended his comments, "Now your mother was one as always knew how to hold her tongue."

The young man's surprise was therefore great when--wishing to escape from the dinner-table after a certain time, as was generally his habit, that he might find his way outside, and smoke a quiet cigar under a sky luminous with stars—Reuben detained him, and commenced a homily on the advantages of an early marriage. He was still more astonished when his father enlarged, after his own fashion, on the attractions of a "jewel of a girl," whom he had seen lately, and who had eyes like blue speedwell, with dark pupils in them, and hair like that described by Burns when he sang about "the lassie wi' the lintwhite locks." Reuben pronounced it "Bur-rns" with a triumphant roll of the "r" which he had learnt from a Scotchman.

(The neighbours might not have considered him quite so matter-of-fact, if they knew how he studied his Burns as well as his Shakespeare.)

"Would you like me to tell ye who the wench may be?"

"I do not see that it signifies," answered Godfrey, seating himself a little unwillingly—feeling as if the whole thing jarred unnaturally with his father's merciless condemnation of girls. "I was thinking—it might—be too soon—after your dinner."

"Ah, you are a sly dog! One would think I had the gout," chuckled Reuben, with imperturbable good-humour as he passed the claret which looked rosy through the venetian glass of a dainty jug. "One might suppose that you would be interested to hear what a short distance divides ye from such a dainty piece of God's work. When a man has no longer any teeth in his mouth, he outgrows the toothache. Mine are a'ready scarce within hail of unanother, like so many milestones. But you—in the heyday of life——"

And the fastidious Godfrey winced as he saw from the twinkle in his father's eyes that he was again inclined to administer to him a thundering slap between the shoulders.

"I see," he said, quickly, "you are afraid that I shall think it necessary to go through epidemics of love-nonsense just as if I were again to be nursed through measles and whooping-cough. Don't trouble yourself. Even if such were to be the case, reason would resume its sway, after a period of abdication, and I should not make myself a greater ass than the majority of mankind."

"And yet *you* prate o' the poets, and write some o' the stuff yerself."

"No, I don't, but poets woo with vows that are imaginary, and their skin-deep wounds are healed directly they leave their scribbling."

Reuben sat with his chin propped up on his hand. What would happen if this *vis inertiae* could not be overcome? He saw for the first time that he had not properly calculated on the tongue-paralysing indifference of this young heart-whole Sir Galahad, who did not even question him as to the whereabouts of his phoenix. If the way in which he had hitherto approached the subject proved to be repugnant to his son's refined nature, what would Godfrey's scruples be when he unfolded his projects a little further?

Yet Reuben prided himself on never being defeated. He suddenly made a false move, dictated by his energy and his semi-despair. Pulling a distended-looking purse from his pocket, he commenced eagerly counting out a heap of notes; and, pushing them towards his son, he said:

"You have odd ideas of your own. You should spend money a little more. What is it you would like? New horses? new books? a shooting-box? a journey to Rome? more pictures? you've but to ask and have."

"Thank you for your kind intentions," said Godfrey, colouring violently, "but I am loaded with so many good things already that it seems to me sometimes I can hardly breathe under them. I have enough of everything and to spare. It is a hotbed of idleness as it is. I did not ask for such luxuries—you mean them kindly. But cannot you put yourself in my place? I might be as eager as you were if I were just setting out in life with a vista of possible wealth opening before me, but now——"

His dislike of wounding other people's feelings restrained him suddenly in his speech. He *could* not tell his father that he had no sense of elevation in inheriting his wealth, and that it was with self-mockery that he consented to sit still and do nothing.

"Of course I don't expect to launch out in a grand scale on my own account, neither should I like it," he said more quietly,

with the involuntary flush still lingering on his cheeks, and not without a sense of humour, which sometimes in these encounters stood him in good stead.

There was a certain independence about his attitude, as he sat with his legs crossed, his arms folded, and his head a little thrown back, that alarmed his father and determined him at once to make the necessary plunge.

"Do you know why I wished ye to stay and talk about this to-night? Can't you guess? I want you to think about marrying—soon."

There was a silence. Godfrey was not what is called a ready man, and the aggressiveness of his father's sudden announcement seemed to have stupefied him.

"Surely there is no hurry," he said, after a pause. "Plenty of time for that."

"Well, lad, you must think o' me. What d'ye think I worked for, if not for the founding of a family? I have been waiting to find you the right mate."

Confused recollections passed through Godfrey's brain of Scott working for Abbotsford and other like memories, which seemed to form a comical contrast to Reuben's ambition.

"In royal families it might be thought necessary to marry, but I don't think we need trouble about ours," he said, a little drily.

"And it's royalty, or something like it, I'm aiming at for you."

Godfrey could no longer control his laughter.

"You talk in riddles."

"The riddles are easy to read. Blue eyes, yellow head, straight as a larch, and one o' the oldest families in England. A girl whose father would have been a baronet."

Godfrey blushed like a woman; then a shadow of a smile—as if his lips curled in scorn in spite of his resolve—hovered about the lower part of his face. Otherwise the expression was one of intense resoluteness.

"Apparently you have a purpose. Cannot I have a purpose too? There is something which I don't understand between you and this neighbour of yours."

"He sees as plainly as I do the importance of uniting the two families."

"I wonder how he would like it, if we were to offer a wife to him."

Reuben laughed now, rather a coarse, loud laugh, which brought the blood again into his son's face. The elder man meant nothing by it. The education on the one side and the want of it on the other, made it impossible for either of these two souls to overcome the formidable barrier which forbade

anything like free interchange of sentiment. Reuben knew nothing of the chivalrous feeling in Godfrey's heart which disturbed his quiet self-possession, and made him hotly indignant that such a compromise could be even named.

"Excuse me. It seems to me that you are taking advantage of this man ; for what purpose I cannot conceive."

"I am doing him a good turn."

"And an ill turn to his niece. Excuse me again, but it seems to me that a girl's name should not be brought into this matter."

"Her uncle can answer for her."

"I am truly obliged to him."

"She is in love with the money, poor girl !" said Godfrey, in an aside to himself. "Pity she can't have it to pay the family debts. But to offer her the money hampered with an encumbrance—no." He said aloud, a little stiffly, "I am sorry I cannot please you. Sir Ralph would hardly wish me to make a victim of his niece."

He remembered with a fresh pang of repugnance, even as he made the remark, that the supposed "victims" in nine cases out of ten, where money is concerned, are ready to sacrifice themselves, and fully to appreciate the advantages of an unlimited income, including unlimited accounts at the jeweller's and the milliner's. The girl who could consent to a compact of this kind would be of a type which he hated. Nothing should induce him to marry her.

"You are mistaken about Sir Ralph," said Reuben hoarsely, and Godfrey began to be sorry for the look of disappointment in his father's face. "A duck couldn't take to the water more quickly than he has taken to the idea o' you young ones making it up between ye."

"I am afraid I am not fit for such high 'mating,' as you call it," answered Godfrey, with scarcely veiled scorn in his voice. "Bold women who take readily to the *rôle* of modern Iphigenias to please impecunious uncles have too much tragi-comedy about them for me. I would rather give my love to some simple, low-born girl."

"When you see her, you'll pipe another tune."

"Not unless you spill some love-philtre over me to rob me of my senses. I to be the one to find the money, and my wife to bring with her fine ways and old blood ! I have no desire to spoil the compactness of the Rashleigh family tree ! Really, it is time such ideas about marriage should have exploded !"

"I have set my mind on it," said his father, still more huskily. "I give you notice that *my son* can only marry so."

"No—now—you are making the thing ridiculous ! You can't get people to marry in this country by driving them to it."

It may be different in France, but I am told the thing is becoming less common even there—quite the ‘*Adelphi Theatre*’ style of thing. You are playing us a practical joke,” said Godfrey, as he attempted a wry smile.

“The intimation of my wishes cannot be looked upon as —”

“As coercion—certainly not; no one dreamed of such a monstrosity. I reserve the privilege of doing as I please with my own life. Of course you would not wish me to take the matter seriously,” added the lad, with an effort which made him for the first time really awkward both in manner and in speech. He bent down his head, that his father should not see the hot colour coming and going on his cheeks, and then—not waiting for further parley—he escaped abruptly into the darkness, and stood alone beneath the starlit sky, drawing long breaths, as if they were necessary to him, of the fresh, pure night air.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was not often that Godfrey lingered with his sketching materials in his father’s grounds. He preferred the stirring breezes which swept over the moor, with the sense of space conveyed by its receding distances. Many a time had he tried to dash in with full brush the masses of wild and flying cloud—in ranges first of all compact, tier under tier, and then with their valves suddenly opening, pouring out tender mists amidst golden glimpses of sunshine. Aristophanes did well, Godfrey used to say, laughingly, to exhibit his philosopher in a basket in the clouds, though Socrates showed that he knew nothing about art when he inquired ironically if people could gain anything by contemplation of the heavens, and if they could make cloud and sunshine whenever they pleased.

But on the morning after his conversation with his father, he seemed to be out of tune for philosophising on the moors, and sought in preference one of those retired nooks still to be found in the out-of-the-way corners of Reuben’s estate, where Nature had been left to her own vagaries, simply because the landscape gardeners were for once at a loss as to how to

"improve her." The spot had been called the "wilderness" when it had belonged to the Rashleighs. There was a sound of water in it like that which you hear in Switzerland. For little rivulets travelling for miles over hill and moor, through ravines and dingles, past woods and mossy stones, gurgling and chattering as they went, had here found for themselves a level in the lake which Reuben had talked of draining. It would be a difficult and expensive matter to drain it, involving the damming up of numerous smaller ducts; for the little streams, which looked brown and green under the overhanging foliage, came rushing in collected force to the lake shooting over smooth masses of stone, or creeping in narrow, pebbly passages.

Next to the wilderness of the open moor, Godfrey loved this bowery enclosure, with its dancing leaf-shadows and stem-shadows, as here and there a sunbeam forced its way through the tangled branches of fir, larch, beech, or oak, and glittered in sparkles of emerald and topaz on the embrowned surface of the stream. The water itself, with its ever-moving fringes of creamy foam, and its endless variety of detail and colour, had alternately fascinated Godfrey, and driven him to despair in the attempts which he had made more than once to represent it with its reflections, its shadows, its curves, and its dimples, its ripples, and its lines of light.

"I am nothing but a ridiculous dilettante," he said to himself, puffing at his cigar as if in contempt of his own absurdity, as once more he set himself to study the rich colours and individual forms which had baffled him before. "It really doesn't much matter, as I don't mean to show the daub to any creature on earth."

But, after a few minutes of intense application, the very outline seemed to mock him, to say nothing of the witchery of colour that lurked in the brown earth-banks, the old roots curiously twisted, the play of sunbeams on the stones, and the miracle of multitudinous leafage overhead. He had been so little accustomed to persevere with anything lately that he soon threw down his brush with a sigh of impatience at what he condemned as his own impotence.

"I don't need any one to tell me I am not a Turner," he muttered, as he drew out another piece of paper, and this time began lazily pencilling the tufts of feathery grass and the petals of the elegantly-bending forget-me-nots, of the colour which the Chinese ceramic artists have introduced into their vases—calling it "sky-after-rain." The forget-me-nots, with the waving grass and the purple lythrum, which hung over the surface of the water, and the dainty ferns, which had found root-room either on mossy tablets of rock, earthy

ledges, or the wider bank, occupied him for the next quarter of an hour.

"Ah, the buds of the forget-me-nots are distinctly pink," he said to himself. Then, in another fit of self-mockery, he added, "I wonder how humanity will be benefited by my testing of that discovery—for the observation is not even mine—I don't know that any observation or *any* special talent is mine, except a genius for drifting and letting my chances go by. However, it seems as if it will be all the same, whether I spend my time in smoking tobacco, playing billiards, or cramming up science. Whatever happens, it appears that I belong to Broadmeads, to be treated generously or meanly as if I were a sort of human skittle. I can't roll away from the property, whether I love it or hate it. There is only one comfort, that I belong to the people, written, as some one says, with a capital P—why, I can't claim the originating even of that feeble joke—but if this property comes to me I will not be a selfish wretch about it, a sort of slaveholder as my father will be, emancipating the blacks and treading down the whites—I will break through—— Oh—h—h!"

Godfrey's father would have used some stronger expletive. But the lad had been brought up in an atmosphere in which swearing is considered ungentlemanly, and his fastidious nature loathed the habit as contemptible and vulgar. Yet he suddenly manifested certain signs of uneasiness, dropping the cigar—which he still held in the fingers of his left hand, having allowed it to go out again after having taken the trouble to light it—and trying to make his dimensions as small as possible that he might hide himself without changing his position beneath the branches of a spreading beech-tree. He was disconcerted when he found that six feet of flesh and blood were not so easily packed into small compass.

"They will see me to a certainty," he reflected. And to a shy man, who had meant to enjoy the pleasures of solitude, the reflection, to say the least of it, was disconcerting. For by the margin of the stream, just where an oblique band of sunlight was slanting across the path, came tripping a bright-eyed, dark-haired child—a child so graceful and yet so tiny in the perfect proportions of her little figure, that through the dim medium of the overshadowing trees it might have been possible to mistake her for a spirit rather than a child, so ethereal and intangible was the sudden apparition. The immaterial idea which Godfrey had first of all connected with the little creature was further carried out by a picturesque style of dress which suited her fantastic beauty. A wreath of briony had been wound round her curly locks. A bunch of roses

had been arranged on her light muslin dress. She carried her hat as a basket which was filled with wild-flowers.

"Oh, if Millais could paint that picture, it would add another to his unique portrait-gallery of children—some of the few faithful and original works which the age has produced," thought the amateur artist, as his eye followed the dancing, elf-like little one.

If the child had been alone, it might have been possible to make friends with her, or to coax her to let him murder her beauty on spoilt paper. But there, apparently, was the *governess*.

"A lady, certainly," reflected Godfrey, not using the word in its liberal and catholic sense, as he would have used it had there been occasion, even to a woman at the washing-tub, but unconsciously in its narrower, more conventional sense. A lady, yes, a perfect gentlewoman—clear-eyed, clear-skinned, straight-waisted, straight-stepping, looking quietly before her with her passionless, guileless eyes, not the least disconcerted by the sight of himself, or at the thought of—did she know it?—that she was trespassing.

But then her dress! The theory of the age had not yet been defined as "*Darwinism tempered with La Follet.*" But Godfrey had been brought too often into contact with girls who could dress ridiculously not to see that there was something queer and shabby in this girl's attire. He had witnessed the apotheosis of the Dolly Varden, if not of the princess robe, and had had in his short life just sufficient experience of the "girl of the period" who had a knack of asserting herself not only by her talk but by her love of personal adornment—to see that there was something odd in the washed-out cotton dress, large, ribbonless, flapping hat, and cotton gloves of this young lady. Doubtless, she must be one of those strong-minded people whose greatness of soul had taught her that it would be impossible to look heroic in frills and furbelows, and that it was more easy to invest a faded cotton-gown with mystery and romance.

She might be Tennyson's gardener's daughter—her colouring was beautiful enough for the part. He was not so sure about the expression of the face; she was probably one of the women who talk philosophy and go in for examinations. Well, after all, that was a move in the right direction—sure to be a little exaggerated, like all reactions, at first, but better, all things considered, than the curate-worshipping girl, who had only one type of male perfection, or the modern Venus who painted her face and pinched her waist.

Godfrey thought it his duty to rise. He would have to do the polite to this little child, who, with her governess, had

wandered into his father's grounds. It was not much in his way. He had never yet been *en rapport* with any one of the sex, and not having a mother or sisters, was never quite sure that he had said the right thing when he addressed one of Eve's daughters.

But before he emerged from his partial concealment, the child had slipped past him, and was kneeling down by the lake, while the elder girl followed slowly, not deigning to turn her head to look at Godfrey, a flush on her cheek being the only sign that she was aware of his proximity.

"Leave the flowers alone, Dot; they look so pretty where they are. And I am afraid the grass is too damp for you to float your paper boats," she said, as she followed the child, and raised her from an attitude which would be sure to spoil her frock.

A few minutes before, Godfrey had been unreasonably irritated at the discovery that his lazy delight in that lullaby of waters and twittering of birds was to be somewhat interfered with. But there was something in that woman's voice which brought the first brightness of a spring day with it, and reminded him of the warbling of his favourite songsters. He forgot the deep shadows on the water, the air spicy with the aromatic odours from the trees, the penetrating perfume of the meadow-sweet, and began to meditate about that voice.

"Now, if I were ever to write a novel, I should talk stuff about a voice, I know I should. They all do it *ad nauseam*. But this is certainly a very curious, unusual type of voice—power in it, and yet, *elle est bien femme*, as the French say. I wonder whether it means anything at all. Not, 'What's in a name?' but what's in a voice?" he said, exasperated again in a most inconsistent way by a feeling that this girl was altogether ignoring his presence.

He raised himself slowly—a little languidly and lazily—for he knew that it was one of Reuben's crotchets to wage war with trespassers on his own domain. He always considered it desirable, whenever it was possible to do so, to avoid bandying words with his father, and yet, in a matter which involved politeness to a lady, he would be ready to vindicate his own quixotic chivalry.

"Allow me," he said, coming forward and raising his hat. "The flowers are just near enough to the water to make it scarcely safe for her to reach them. And as to floating paper boats, they will all be swamped, if she tries to do it for herself. It will be quite easy for me to help her."

The young lady, whose face had attracted him the moment before, returned his bow with—was it possible?—a look of unwillingness. It was as if a shadow had suddenly fallen on

her, as she fixed her beautiful eyes on him, almost as if she did not see him, but was looking through him and beyond him, thinking out some train of thought.

Godfrey's pale cheek flushed.

"Thanks," she said, a little coldly. And he, gazing still at her face, saw a dignity which was unexpected in it, and which somehow made him ill at ease. "Thank you for your kind offer, but we have no need of the forget-me-nots."

And before the young man could get over the impression of being thoroughly and unmistakably snubbed, and that by a lady who was trespassing in his own grounds, and to whom he had intended to be polite, she had called again, with a slight trembling in her voice, owing to some agitation which he did not understand :

"Dot, come here when I tell you, or I shall be angry. Leave the forget-me-nots, naughty child ! or I must come and fetch you."

Perhaps it was the unusual imperiousness of tone which jarred upon the nerves of an evidently spoiled child. But the little one, far from moving, stamped her foot with an angry gesture, pointing at the flowers with her forefinger, her pretty face convulsed with passion.

"Pray allow me," said Godfrey again, "she has evidently set her mind on those forget-me-nots, it will be so easy to get them for her."

And, before she had time to expostulate, Godfrey—who could no more endure to see a child's pretty features transformed with rage, than he could hear of details in the controversy about vivisection—was wading two or three feet deep in the muddy water, regardless of his polished boots and one of Poole's best-fitting suits. He returned with his hands filled with the forget-me-nots, golden moneywort, and purple lythrum.

Dot held out her arms for them, but he shook his head.

"No, they will soil your pretty dress. I am sure your governess will kindly carry them." For she whom he called the governess had now come up to them, and he had time again to remark her splendid physique, the healthiness of her cheek, the well-poised head, and the elastic movements of her limbs—showing that she had been brought up in no hot-house atmosphere.

"A daughter of the people—and how superior to the sluggish creatures with gas-lit colouring, who are so languid in their movements and whose veins are so ill-fed with blood that they can only talk affectedly," he was thinking to himself admiringly, as he said, holding the flowers out of the child's reach and smiling at the older girl :

"You will take them for her, I am sure. The stalks are not dirty—only a little wet."

"They will not soil *my* dress. Oh, yes, I will take them," she answered, with a smile which began in her eyes, but seemed scarcely to have reached her lips before her little charge, with new and unreasonable wrath—puckering her small forehead into fresh furrows—cried, in shrill anger :

"She is not my governess."

"Caprice, thy name is woman," thought Godfrey, with wide open eyes, "what have I done to offend them now, that they are ready to put out thorns again like a pair of porcupines?"

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you," said Vere, as she held out her hand for the flowers. "And it is quite true—I do—teach my cousin."

"Oh!"—disconcerted, he scarcely knew why—for he was one who believed in the dignity of labour, and thought that a gentlewoman was no less truly a gentlewoman because she made use of her talents to serve her generation. "This is surely the proudest woman in the world, but it is tomfoolery for her to be mortally hurt because I took her for a governess," he said to himself. And then aloud, with the usual untruthfulness which is supposed to elevate educated people in matters of courtesy above the plain-speaking of savages :

"I am sorry. I beg a thousand pardons."

"What for? Because I teach my little cousin?" she said, so simply and straightforwardly that he could scarcely have a suspicion that she was laughing at him when she looked so innocent. "I can't say I can't grasp your meaning."

Meanwhile he had been carefully wiping the flowers with his white pocket-handkerchief, and was about to hand them to her before he answered, when a new and unaccountable change came over the little creature who still stood as if planted by the lake.

She had been listening to the few words which had passed, fixing a pair of bright, keen eyes first on Godfrey, and then on her own companion—surveying them both as if she were a little person accustomed to comprehensive criticism, and determined to detect why her cousin had held back with an involuntary horror of meeting some one when she had that morning suggested that they should float paper boats in the old lake. Suddenly she seemed to have found the clue; for, with authority, she stretched out her little arm, and shouted, not a whit mollified by her cousin's entreating looks :

"Go away, naughty man! You had no right to come here and steal my papa's pretty places."

Godfrey was silent and annoyed. His cheeks became aflame as a new light broke in upon him. And his confusion was reflected in Vere's expressive face.

"Forgive her," she said pleadingly, "the story is common property; she must have heard other people talk about it—and, you know, they *will* put their own colouring on things. We should not have ventured here, had I known that we should intrude upon you."

He still held the flowers.

"Spare me," she said, "and keep them. Oh, I do think the child is right! What would *your* father say if he knew that we, of all people in the world, had robbed him of his flowers? There is said to be a passion for possessing things in your family."

"You are pleased to be sarcastic. I dare say it is excellent discipline for me to find that people can be rough on me for offences committed before I was born. But really you might soften the heart of your little cousin, and persuade her to take the things which caused me some amount of inconvenience to pick."

It was Vere's turn to blush. She had intended to preserve a strict incognita; but the child's exclamation had deprived her of her prudence, and now—it was her own fault—she had put herself in the wrong.

"I did not mean to be impolite. Oh! you can give her the flowers; they will not hurt her frock. It was washed at home, and I—I ironed it myself. I dare say you think me proud, but I have enough to make me humble. I cannot even afford to sit still and listen, day after day, to my uncle's forebodings. I promised her mother on her deathbed that Dorothy at least should be properly cared for, and always look nice."

There was suppressed passion in the speech, and he interpreted it correctly as less of a confidence than uttered in heat and pain, and aimed in some way at himself.

"If I might presume to offer sympathy——" he began impulsively.

"How can you offer it? You are a perfect stranger," she answered, regaining her calmness, and smiling at him as if she had been accustomed to smile at people all her life. "I know you mean kindly. You can give Dot the flowers, and that will be quite what they call romantic."

"We are neighbours more than strangers," he continued, speaking rapidly, determined not to be left "out in the cold" in this fashion, and therefore ignoring the somewhat stiff little bow which she was beginning to make to him in token of farewell. "I was just going to say that it is nonsense about forebodings. Why in the world should an earthquake come to your uncle? Why should not the close of his life be happier than the beginning? We have both had some of the same misfortunes; I also have lost a mother—and——"

She checked him by a look which, for the instant, brought

back his shyness. The passing touch of her astonishment made him for the first time discern that he had done something unconventional. And yet, was it not her fault? Had she not felt uncomfortable the moment after she had unwittingly spoken of the death of Dorothy's mother, recalling the own mother who was more to *her* than a shadow—a memory ever living, sometimes causing her tears, sometimes brighter outlooks to the better country further on?

"You mean kindly," she said, once more, "but I don't like consoling speeches."

"Don't let your uncle have forebodings. I am sure there can be no possible cause."

"You might guess that the cause of his trouble is simple enough," she said, glancing at her dress, the plainness of which gave significance to her speech.

"Are you really one of those who think that happiness depends on riches?"

"I told you I did not like consoling maxims," she said, a little impatiently, "they may do to put in books, but they won't bear pulling to pieces. Riches *do* confer happiness, it is nonsense to say they don't."

"There is a higher happiness with which I fancy they have nothing to do."

She answered him with raised eyebrows and a slightly cynical shrug of the shoulders. Her expression seemed to say: "That is sentiment. I should not have expected that sort of poetry from your father's son;" or it would be truer to say that his sensitiveness interpreted her meaning as such.

He bowed in his turn somewhat coldly, and she, calling to her cousin, turned to retrace her steps by the pathway which wound beside the beck.

"You forget," he said, "it is a long way round by the bridge which leads to the fields, and just close by there is a door that leads straight into your park."

"Guarded by chains and bolts," she answered; "thanks to your father. Yet to-day some of your men left it open."

"How prejudiced you are against him! Nothing is easier than to undo the bolts."

"And run the risk of a lawsuit," she replied, with another bow, and the air of one accustomed to give neat little retorts.

Godfrey had had little experience of women, except of those who fawned on him as the heir of an immense property. He had fancied himself "shy" because he had been spoilt by women, "battered," as he would have called it, by their flatteries. But, though this girl had seemed at first inclined to be resentful, a sort of freemasonry, which neither had been able to avoid, had already been established between them.

"Oh, you are too hard on us," he said; and both of them laughed.

It is not until people have received a certain amount of education, or till there is some sort of mutual understanding, that they can afford to laugh. If we did not laugh when there is a sort of crisis at times, there would be more quarrellings and heart-burnings, and more weeping philosophers.

Godfrey laughed, and Vere laughed, the former till the tears stood in his eyes, and the laughter did something to clear the uncomfortable atmosphere.

"It is very stupid, but you know we may be taken up for trespassers."

"You *really* think it? You really thought it possible that you might see a coarse brute with red face barring your passage. My father is not a bit like that," said the young man, suddenly becoming grave, and looking at her without a sign of evasiveness in his affable face.

"He believes it," she thought, shaking her head; "it will take him a long time to know his father. His is evidently one of those sweet-tempered natures which are too often wanting in will. I wonder how long it will take to shake him out of his complacency, his content."

Aloud she said:

"No, I thank you; it is not my way to ask favours. I prefer to go by the way in which we came, as you are quite sure we shall not have a bailiff after us. Tell your man not to leave open the door again, if he does not wish us to claim a right to come through it."

"I trust you will always claim that right. My father pulled down the other bridge to save disputes; but I am very sorry he did it."

"I did not mean to intrude into your father's private reasons. We Rashleighs are not supposed to be versed in the secrets of your family."

The tone in which she answered was so decisive that he did not speak again.

He sat down once more on the grass when she had gone, and tried to occupy himself again with pencilling little scraps of scenery which might be useful to him in his studio. But that "wise passiveness" in a man's heart, which is said to be necessary for the full revelation of beauty, had utterly deserted him for the day. The significance taught by Wordsworth of the simplest thing did not seem to be as real to him as usual. But, instead, his memory was troubled with a couplet—

"Then felt I as some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken."

"She likes the forget-me-nots—the child will probably bring her again," he said to himself, as he closed his portfolio, determining that, in future, modern sanitary reform should be to him as a red rag to a bull, whenever his father talked of draining that lake and doing away with the wild flowers.

The prize was certainly great, but he must move cautiously. Allowing as little as possible for the influence of artificial distinctions, here was a girl who was not to be easily moulded to any one's hand. To think of winning her by the ordinary baits would be unutterable insanity.

"Good heavens," he muttered to himself, "how I blundered! I ought to have guessed at first that my father was fibbing atrociously when he talked of her as ready to fling herself at any one's head. I ought to have known that the very sight of any one of the name of Sellwood would be likely to make her sore and miserable. I ought to have known she was in trouble. How atrociously cold she must have thought me!"

CHAPTER X.

"It is just a question of time as to when that little petulant rogue, who is so determined to have her own way, brings her cousin here again to float her paper-boats," said Godfrey to himself, not ill-pleased at the idea.

He left the garden-door unlocked, forgetting that Dot, who had shown herself so intolerant of contradiction, and who had listened to the conversation between himself and Vere, would be likely to find her way alone when she chose through the unfastened door. By his carelessness he proved that he knew little of children. For had he not lingered in the sleepy hollow himself, preferring—in a new frame of mind in which everything seemed vague and undefined—to listen to the murmur of the waters and the sighing of the trees, instead of amusing himself on the more open moor, the comedy might have been turned into a tragedy.

He was busy as usual one morning over some pencilled notes when a shriek, and a slight splash like that of a big water-rat, roused him to the discovery of the child who was

in imminent danger of drowning in the lake. It would have been impossible to have seen Vere to better advantage than when, with a suspicion of moisture in her velvety eyes, she thanked him as if he had performed an act of bravery, for rescuing the little one with such promptitude.

"On the contrary, it was *my* fault that she strayed," answered the young man, with a twinge of conscience.

And from this time Dorothy, instead of eyeing him strangely with uncomfortable insinuations about men who were "naughty," liked instead to climb on his knee, nestle her head against his shoulder, and prattle her childish secrets into his ear.

Then came a formal invitation from Reuben Sellwood, begging that the young ladies would make any use they liked of his grounds, and more than once Vere, in her visits to the poor in the neighbourhood, was passed by Godfrey on a thorough-bred horse which his father had purchased for him.

"Ah, he is a sly dog," thought Reuben, in secret satisfaction; "there was that horse for a long while eating its head off in the stable. And now he has found out that he likes to ride. He knows that he looks well on horseback. It is as if he had arranged everything to make the best impression on her. He did not care a bit about the Tarringmoor people, but now he wants to be seen in all his glory."

For the first time Godfrey had found some one to whom he could talk of the stirring days which he had spent at Oxford, and who could value as he did all those influences which deepen life and broaden culture. But, though he met the cousins occasionally and had a little talk on each occasion, Vere was chary of accepting his father's invitation.

He could not help remembering afterwards how it was, *previous* to Reuben's invitation, that Dorothy had fancied some honeysuckle on the opposite bank. He would never forget the day when the child's convenient fancy had led him to untie the old boat, which had not been used for some time, but was chained to the bank, and had furnished him with an excuse for rowing the cousins until he was obliged to admit:

"We cannot go further; there are so many weeds. My father is right. The lake needs a little clearing. We are already close upon the brushwood."

As he spoke, he gave a push with his pole—for the oar had somehow disappeared—and there was a fresh scream from Dot, who had curled herself up in the bottom of the boat, and was listening to the rippling of the water.

After this, Vere refused to venture again on the water, and he—too fearful of forgetting himself, and showing his hand betimes, if he over-urged her—contented himself often with lying on the greensward smoking, and watching the girls at a

respectful distance. It is always a critical, if not a dangerous, thing—as persons of a match-making tendency are very well aware—for two young people of opposite sexes to be constantly with each other. For they will either get to hate each other, or to know each other too well.

Now it so turned out that Vere was the first girl with whom Godfrey had ever exchanged partial confidences. She was, likewise, the first girl with whom he had come in contact who could appreciate his dreamy ideas, and be ready to talk a sort of poetry. She was downright, and, on occasions, full of fun, and yet, like himself, she had what may be called the religious tendency to a marked degree, without having any definite opinions about religion. She also had her artistic theories, and therefore was not ready to laugh at his. She differed from other girls with whom he had met, in not calling Wordsworth “an old stupid,” and being perfectly able to appreciate that new way of looking at the beauties of natural scenery, which was perhaps first inaugurated by Rousseau, but developed by our insular poets to finer issues.

Had the match-makers left them alone, to get to know each other without that bungling interference which is so often fatal, a feeling of interest, mingled with curiosity, which both these young people began to feel for each other, would have merged, sooner or later, into a more tender sentiment. But Godfrey scarcely knew whether Vere was in jest or earnest, when she said one day, with a new appearance of coldness :

“I do not see how—when your father behaves so strangely as he does to my uncle—it can very well be possible for us to be friends.”

He would have resented the speech from any one else, but this girl had an odd way of speaking her mind, as if she had been privileged from her cradle. He knew that she thought his father vulgar, and the set of people with whom he associated at Tarringmoor underbred ; and he was a little vexed with himself for taking it as a testimony to his own superiority, that she could speak freely to himself notwithstanding such drawbacks. These were days in which Reuben seemed to him a very undesirable father, a most awkward father to have, viewed in connection with the fifth commandment ; when he felt as if that father was setting up a barrier between himself and the woman in whom he was interested, by his cruel want of refinement and the freedom of his comments. Poor Reuben, in his radiant eagerness, had no suspicion that he was transgressing beyond the bounds of conventional decorum when he exclaimed one day :

“I knew that you would take my lady’s fancy.”

“How could you imagine that I should be such a coxcomb

as to flatter myself that any girl could fall in love with me?" answered the young fellow, reddening and indignant.

"And why not?" snorted Reuben, like a war-horse scenting the battle. "She's none so handsome, after all, nor so rich, that she need set herself up."

"For heaven's sake, don't speak of it any more."

The determined old man would not be so baulked of his prey, and began smoking the large pipe which held an unusual amount of tobacco.

"The sort of beauty which she has soon passes," he said, after a pause, remembering that he had the letter by him in which Sir Ralph had promised to do his best to promote his niece's marriage with Reuben's son, and that there was not the slightest reason to anticipate the possibility of Vere declining to carry out the conditions, since, in that case, Sir Ralph would be beggared, and he had implicit confidence in his honour.

"Beauty is but skin-deep," he continued, meditating aloud. "Now I used to be told that the girls in Europe were like a lot of dolls, with their heads full of sawdust."

"And no doubt you had a great curiosity to see those marvels of civilisation," said Godfrey lightly, thinking it wisest to ignore his father's other allusions.

How could he tell such a man as Reuben that beauty seemed to him only occasional, never perfect, always fluctuating, but that love continually suggested it in the features of others, and that it need never be wholly absent from our eyes? Would not the old man laugh offensively if he had the faintest idea that his "boy" looked upon his fellow-creatures less as bodily presences than as spirits clothed with bodies, and that not only did he consider a woman's physical aspect to be a correct index of the spiritual, but that it occurred to him, at times when his father jarred upon him, to think of his own spirit as independent of relationship and accident, and to wish he could be free from the trammels caused by such ties of blood?

He hated these constant allusions to Vere, which ran like a vein through the elder man's conversation. But, though the drops of perspiration began to stand in beads on his forehead, his unruffled features did not betray his agitation as he answered his inquisitor:

"I don't know whether Miss Rashleigh is like a Venus or not. I only know that I have seen a good many women, but never *that* sort of woman before."

It was a very ambiguous compliment, and not one which Reuben understood. He understood still less when Godfrey said slowly:

"It is a terrible thing—this lottery of marriage. People talk as if love-making were a passion for boys and girls, beneath

the older people, and not worthy of them. If it were so, I would rather have nothing to do with it. I do not know whether I can expect you to follow me when I say that I think a great step like this must affect our moral being to——”

He stopped and cleared his throat. Had he been a woman, he would have said: “To all eternity.” But just as he had never talked to his father about the stirring days at Oxford, or discussed his friends and college tutors with him, so the deeper matters of existence lay untouched, like an abyss between them.

“I—I have a feeling,” he continued, with an effort, “that the wife I may choose will influence me, not only for all time, but—but—beyond it. I might by chance pitch on a wife with whom my life might be led—in—in such a way as I could wish, but there may be ninety-nine others with whom it would be a failure. I cannot, of course, say this to the majority of people; they would take me for a humbug, or perhaps a maniac.”

“Maniac” seemed to Reuben to be a mild word, as he literally gasped for breath, and stared in astonishment at his “poet.” He himself was accustomed to speak of the most sacred topics as he would have spoken of Free Trade, Women’s Suffrage, or any other political matter. Nothing, in fact, *was* sacred to him, and he blessed his stars, as he gave another whiff at his pipe, that he at least was free from the endless detail of this complex and worrying civilisation, in which folks were so squeamish, and made such odd distinctions for themselves.

“Something to do with the Greek and Latin,” he muttered to himself, with just sufficient light upon the matter to be aware that Godfrey showed more repugnance than enthusiasm to his way of putting things.

“In my days,” he began, in rather a surly tone of voice, “every Jack had his Jill; but——”

“Ah! that’s a joke,” interrupted Godfrey, glad to catch at any straw for refuge. “I thought you must be joking—it’s the best way to joke at such notions. I don’t think you would wish me to take the matter too seriously. Really it is too absurd for us to harp on any idea which is so thoroughly exploded as that of compulsory marriage.”

“Why, I thought you yourself saw the sense of the possibility of a match between——”

“The *possibility*, yes, but you can’t get people to marry in this country by driving them to it. It is really too ridiculous.”

“And why is it too ridiculous?” thundered Reuben, on his side growing angry.

“Oh, because—don’t you see, no people who have any stuff in them—men or women—could think of simulating

love—the thing would not only be irksome, it would be disgusting.”

Both men had their blood up. There was something of a likeness between them just then, in spite of the way in which Reuben had disguised his features.

“You use strong language, young man,” said Reuben between his set teeth. “Ah, you are a man of the world because I had ye taught. You know its customs, its false ways, better than I do, for all you are so fastidious and exclusive. I know these aristocrats, and I know what will humiliate them. It’s not so out-of-the-way, even in this country, for folks who wish to keep an estate together to join families like the houses o’ York and Lancaster. You may stand out against me now, but you’ll have to give in.”

Godfrey winced. He could not trust himself to answer.

“Look at your hands now,” cried the elder man, stung into fiercer rage by his son’s silence, “they are the white helpless hands of a girl who never worked for her living. I should like just to ask you who nourished you, who educated you? Who paid your debts, to say nothing of who gave you life? Ah, and after all, you are mortified before *your* world by my ignorance of its ways. And the first thing that I ask you is to be denied—my dearest wish disobeyed—my—”

“Father!”

“Ah, yes, I frighten you; but you think nothing of my wishes. ‘Do this to please me,’ has no effect on your fine feelings. But did you ever know me give up what I had set my heart upon? I can tell you it has never yet chanced to me in the course of a longish life to be beaten in anything, and what is more—I never mean to be.”

“One may defy the Fates once too often,” said the younger man, trying to speak lightly, though the veins were swollen like whipcords on his forehead. “Pray, don’t agitate yourself until you know there is something really to cause the agitation.”

It was not true that he was frightened, but that he was humiliated to the dust by this exhibition of blind rage in the man who had given him being. Fortunately, however, it takes two to make a quarrel, and Godfrey—who had no fancy for bandying angry words, which would only embitter feelings and discredit the respectability of the house—rose and slipped away quietly before his father had accomplished his purpose of extorting from him a promise which might have been easy to give, but difficult to fulfil.

CHAPTER XI.

AT Rashleigh Hall a conversation no less awkward had been taking place between uncle and niece.

Vere had been used from her babyhood to all sorts of disagreeable surprises. Her own anxieties ever since she had come to years of discretion had been far-reaching, but she had never thought of blaming her uncle for the uncomfortable state of matters. It was not *his* fault, she reflected, that he had become accustomed to associate his niece with all the meaner devices of household economy which she would gladly have hidden from him. There was no poetry about such poverty, and she could in certain states of feeling sympathise with him in wishing to ignore it and keep it at arm's length. She was perfectly well aware that his eyes generally rested with pleasure on the pretty little daughter whom she managed to dress artistically; also that he had a myth of his own by which he attributed her own meaner attire and the poverty-stricken appearance of the house partially to her perverseness and love of feminine contradiction. Therefore a secret air of watchful interest with which he had lately begun to look at her was a surprise. She was afraid that it boded ill.

Her fear was not diminished when he said to her one evening :

"What pretty hair you have, my dear ! It is a pity that you do not take more pains in dressing it."

"I have never heard you say so before."

"It strikes me particularly lately. I have never seen prettier."

She laughed a little uncomfortably.

Why did he touch her cheek patronisingly as if she were some domestic animal? His hand shook a little as he did so, and she noticed that it was growing wrinkled. His state of something like premature old age grieved her.

A sudden pallor overspread his features, and his lips were pressed tightly together, as he added :

"You mustn't blame me for making the most of your personal advantages. I am practically a pauper. I am weary of keeping up a poor pretence of being as well-off as my neighbours."

It was the first time she had heard him speak in this cynical manner about money matters. But after all she was inclined to welcome any stoical resolve by which he could show

that he could face inconveniences and the changes of fortune like a man.

So she plucked up courage and answered :

"If all the people about us were once for all disabused of the false idea that the Rashleighs can keep up appearances, it would be easier for every one. I should say that, the sooner we make every one understand it the better."

How was it that she could never please him by her answers ? He winced as he said :

"I suppose you would like to see the house shut up, the servants discharged, and the park let out in building lots?"

"Not exactly that. But it seems a pity for you to worry yourself so much about trifles."

"Trifles," he said, "trifles ! Would you like to leave the home of your ancestors ? Would you like other eyes and other feet to desecrate this place ? I am being robbed of all that makes life dear."

"There are other spots of earth as beautiful," she ventured, timidly. "Who can deprive us of the right of property in that which we admire ? We *make* it our own as much as if we had paid for it in money."

He rose and walked about the room, trembling visibly as he did so. Then he faced her and said, abruptly :

"I am being robbed, and you do not care for it. For me to seek a refuge or a shield in *you* is, I ought to know already, worse than useless."

She was used to these changes of mood in her uncle, and yet there was an anomaly in the somewhat unusual expression of his face which startled her. She had never trusted herself to answer his bitter words. She could not expend on passion or on undutiful rejoinder the strength she had to husband for her hard every-day struggles.

"It is this upstart—belonging to the riff-raff—who has supplanted me."

"Oh, I thought that he had helped you," she said beneath her breath. She could not venture to acknowledge the thought which was in her mind, and which was somewhat hard to stifle—how it seemed to her that her uncle was jealous like the elder son in the parable, who forgot, in his murmuring, that all which the Father of mankind had was his, and that, however the younger brother might succeed, he could not be robbed of his birthright.

She stood still as if rooted to the ground beneath Sir Ralph's piercing gaze when he added, abruptly :

"This Sellwood is a vulgar upstart, but he has an unusual son. Tell me what you think of him?"

It was imaged upon her brain, as if by a sudden flicker of

light, that the conversation had some sort of connection with Reuben's son, so she said, hesitatingly :

"Why do you ask me?"

"Women's brains are not suited for——" he answered impatiently, the rest of the sentence being muttered to himself. "Why do you force me to put the matter baldly? This *chef-d'œuvre* of perfection—Sellwood's son—I have seen him myself—is not only remarkable but exceptional—gifted with extraordinary talents——"

"Well, what does it matter what I think of him? I should think it would be a good thing not to quarrel, to—to——"

"To patch up a kind of reconciliation," he exclaimed, with his fingers closing convulsively over Reuben's letter. "You know well enough that you are distressing me. You might guess at my meaning, without obliging me to put it vulgarly. Am I not humiliated enough? These people wish to keep up the old estate—to join the two families. Such things are sometimes done. Living out of the world, as we do, you could not even hope to marry a younger son in a good family. Our acquaintances of yesterday have flung us aside like old gloves to-day. That is the way in society, when you have not a shilling to count upon. But here are people ready to worship the very ground you tread on. Young Sellwood will make a capital husband. These are times of transition, when even old families do not inquire very much into any one's forbears. These people are up to their necks in gold. I have long made up my mind that it will be better for you to marry a——"

He had been speaking rapidly, and pacing about as if he were a caged animal, but he had ceased to look her in the face.

She had recovered her voice by this time. The new surprise had shaken her a little, but hers was the dominant nature, and she had generally had the best of it hitherto in any encounter of wits.

"Ah, that's your idea about marriage," she said, in her firmest tones. "Mine differs from it completely, and I think my mother's would, if she had lived. Let us talk of something else."

"You have no enjoyment in your life. You are ground down by this miserable poverty—you have seen nothing of life."

"Pray, don't pity me. I like my life as it is. A life all of dressing and gaiety, with afternoon teas squeezed in between balls and concerts, operas and lawn-tennis parties—hurrying here and there. I can't bear even the thought of it."

"You don't mean to say——"

"I am quite content. I don't want a husband—I——"

A complexity of instincts checked her speech.

"It really seems so funny," she said, and then laughed uncontrollably, till the tears came into her eyes.

It seemed to help her to keep the indignation from being concentrated in her voice. For she had made a rapid induction, and reproached herself already with a conclusion to her speech, which had not been quite artless.

Then, dropping her voice, she added :

"You must give me time to think a little. It is so easy to be misguided, when one wishes to please kind relations, and to do a thing which is wrong—terribly wrong in itself—from, apparently, a right motive."

"If so, a merciful Judge would not lay it to your door," the voice within her seemed to answer, as she stood pressing her hands to her eyes, in a very different attitude from the compliant one in which her uncle had supposed all young girls would let their womanly impulses sway them. "This—this man must have some hold on my poor uncle—some claim—which he has promised to forego—on a consideration—and that consideration——" She could get no further.

She moved her hands from her eyes, and looked down at the faded Turkey carpet—full, in spite of its shabbiness, of subtle gradations of colour—and fancied she remembered to have read somewhere that there used to be a law which allowed debtors in old, benighted times, to offer the hands of their daughters, and even of their wives, to their creditors, and that the creditors accepted these women in lieu of their debt, if they were sufficiently pleasing.

"I wonder if the Archæological Society could fix the date of the last time a woman was sold in England?" she said to herself, with a pain which rankled in her heart. Then aloud, and with a sort of scorn which she could no longer attempt to veil, she added :

"Some one says that there is no such happy life for a woman as that spent in suffering for those she loves—that a woman can transform self-denial into pleasure—that such suffering ought to be a great angel to her. But it depends on what sort. If, for instance, I were to marry a man whom I could not tell that I could like, and afterwards see many others who were superior to him; if I were to please you by joining two families without even the pretence that I was chosen for myself, and that I was one of a special pair of people predestined for each other—what becomes of the 'marriages-made-in-heaven' theory, and all the rest of those ideas?"

"You take away my breath," cried Sir Ralph, impatiently. "Why express yourself so coarsely?"

"I am simply thinking out the problem of how to do my duty to you, and yet not to stain my own conscience," she answered, with a pathos that grew piteous in the eyes which could sometimes be full of fun and sometimes of pathetic entreaty. "I—I don't quite understand, and I should like to ask just one other question. If this appeal comes to you from young Mr. Sellwood, why did he not address me in the proper way? In matters of this kind it is not usual to refer to such business-like arrangements at all."

The question took him aback. He was not prepared for it, and, after reflecting a minute, parried it by another.

"You do not find him so disagreeable then, and if——"

Now it was *her* turn to shrink from the gaze of the questioner. She had never prevaricated, and did not mean to begin now, however hard she might be driven.

"There is no occasion to talk of 'ifs' at all," she answered, trying to be conscientious, though evasive. "But it seems to me that Mr. Sellwood can speak for himself, and it will be time enough to consider the subject when he *does* speak."

"He *must* like you—he will feel himself honoured—he will never dream of thwarting his father's purpose."

"Can *I* not have my purpose too?" she said, drawing herself up—and looking, as her uncle afterwards said, as if she were Sappho and Hypatia rolled into one—"one cannot live with one's eyes shut, and of course I cannot help seeing how terribly people suffer when they make unhappy marriages."

On the lips of a person advanced in life such a statement might be tolerated, but from a girl it seemed to him to savour of worldly wisdom and almost of arrogance.

"You are young to be already acquainted with the miseries of life," and the bitterness of his tone touched her.

"I have need to be acquainted with it when you talk of me as if I were a bale of cotton," she cried, indignantly, suddenly forgetting her dignity.

"The day is stormy—there is a good deal of electricity in the air, and you have a nervous attack," he answered, pleased with his diplomatic talent; "girls of twenty should have no nerves."

"Uncle," she said, beseechingly, and laid her head against his shoulder, "you will promise me not to speak of this again."

"I will promise you not to urge you or to force you to anything. We will do nothing prematurely," he replied, still confident in his own diplomacy, and not thinking it necessary to excuse or explain away any act of his own.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR RALPH was too much occupied with his own anxieties to notice his niece's heavy eyelids and tightly-drawn lips as she appeared at the breakfast-table on the following morning.

She escaped as soon as she could into the wilderness in which lately she had seen a thousand minute beauties which even Godfrey would not have noticed. But she did not see them now as she hurried along, hoping that rapidity of motion would help her to calm her thoughts.

"Was it possible," she went on crying to herself, "possible that they should even *dream* of a bargain so degrading?"

Shame had prevented her from speaking out as she would have liked to have done. She had done little more than pull the check-string, but now delay would give her time to regulate matters in her own way. Her usual honest way of looking at things had come to her assistance, and with it a reaction of feeling which was certainly hard upon an innocent man. She would have liked to have been able to say with truth that her inmost feelings were against the match, even if Godfrey had been desperately set on it. But a belief that a trap had been laid with his connivance made her wild with indignation.

On the previous evening her uncle had spoken of thunder in the sultry atmosphere. For a morning early in July, there was an unusual feeling of languor—a heat as of burning summer in the air. In the garden of Broadmeads, which was all ablaze with flowers, there was here and there a drone bee, but even the butterflies which ventured out of their hiding-places seemed to swim languidly in the sultry atmosphere. Far away on the moor—glimpses of which could be seen through the branches of the trees—the heather was already being fired to crimson by the unusual force of the sun, and in the early morning a sort of luminous mist hovered over the river. Here, even in the wilderness, there was a perceptible weight in the air, a rippling of the water which made one sleepy, and a lazy droop of the leaves.

Godfrey, who was peculiarly susceptible to all atmospheric influences, and to whom that languid ripple of the stream had all the force of a narcotic, roused himself at the sound of a footstep from a dreamy trance which was overtaking him in the midst of what he considered to be a most unsatisfactory sketch. It was with a feeling of self-mockery at his own weakness and want of decision in a difficult crisis that he also had sought

the "wilderness," knowing perfectly well that, since his father had invited Miss Rashleigh to make free use of this portion of the property which originally belonged to her ancestors, it had become her favourite haunt in hot weather.

He raised his hat as he saw her in the distance, but she gave him a stiff, sweeping bow, and was passing him a few minutes afterwards with a strange, fleeting glance, her eyes resting on him for a moment, as if she had not thought it worth while to go out of her path, but was scarcely aware of his presence. At that moment the sun fell on her through an opening between the branches, and he saw more plainly than he had ever seen before a want of regularity of feature which in general was not noticeable. Her usual lovely colouring seemed to have deserted her, and her face looked severe in a sort of Holbein shadowlessness. It was as if a different coloured light had been turned on her since he saw her last. *She* was not changed, but the medium was.

"Ah, I might have known it," he muttered to himself, turning pale, in spite of a strong effort to conceal his annoyance. "I might have known it. Some horrible gossip has possibly reached her, and the disgust which she would naturally feel would be sure to set her against me."

Had there not been a natural recoil of his own heart at the first sight of her in the distance—a recoil which, in the case of the woman, would be a hundred times intensified? Shame on those who had caused it!

He hesitated no longer, but jumping up with a ready joke, laughed:

"I am spoiling paper as usual."

She felt frightened and shaken when he addressed her, for she likewise had felt it impossible to decide exactly what should be her line of action. Her heart swerved from its regular beat, and she felt herself growing red and tremulous as she answered:

"If I could afford to buy splendid pictures, I should feel it lost labour to be always painting them."

It was less the words than the tone in which she uttered them that had to his ears a condemnatory sound. Could it be the same voice, the cadence of which he had first of all admired for its bird-like tones?

"Ah! that is the bother of having money," he answered eagerly. "Don't remind me of it; one loses the spur to action."

Perhaps the reply was unexpected. She acknowledged it with a regal inclination of her head, trying to appear as indifferent as before, but being unable to prevent a sharp flash out of that pair of dark-blue eyes which had never looked at him

with disapprobation before. Possibly the young fellow would rather have seen that sign of her ill-favour than no intimation at all that she was aware of his presence. As it was, he continued, in low-voiced, mock melancholy :

"Don't you see that if I were to purchase yards of pictures—as many as they have in the Crystal Palace—I should learn more by coming to Nature as a meek student myself. I have made such a mess of lots of things that it comforts me to recollect that the most dismal failures are, after all, sometimes the path to success."

"*Sometimes*," she repeated, a little ironically.

"We'll say that a turned lesson is a condition of most people's knowledge; a path retraced sometimes leads to a better thing—it's all a lottery about success."

"'Tis not in Nature to command success,
But we'll do more, Horatio—we'll deserve it,"

—she quoted, with a facetious toss of her head, but still with the air of a young woman who speaks little to a stranger.

It was surprising what an honest intention each had of being disagreeable to the other. He could not help remembering, with a slight amount of sarcasm, how, a day or two before, she had told him, more by hints than in a direct manner, some of the little experiences of her life, and how eagerly he had listened to the unconscious revelations. Now he himself had a sense of talking to her as if over a fence.

"I don't know about *deserving* it," he answered, a little sadly. "Some men are more conscious of failure than others. They start with such fine ideals, and turn heart-sick when they are none of them realised. Don't you hope sometimes that through pain crooked things may be made straight?"

She was intending to resent his way of talking to her if he should dare to lay claim to a certain proprietorship—a sort of understood arrangement between himself and her uncle, in which he might venture to take it all for granted. And, to her surprise, he was only asking a deferential question.

"I forgot," he said, "you are too young to have gone through any such tedious process."

"It is exceedingly kind of you," she replied, with a suspicion of laughter in her eyes, "to make me out to be young when there is not so much to choose between our ages."

She was more like her usual self with that look of natural fun just dawning in her face, and he drew a sigh of relief as he answered :

"I meant to be most tremendously civil. It seemed to me there was some new sort of ritual to be observed this morning. I never studied formalities, but possibly amongst the numerous

books which are published there may be one to regulate etiquette between neighbours who meet in each other's grounds."

"It is *your* park—it is good of you to let me use it."

It was a momentary tribute to fairness which any honest Englishwoman might wish to render, and at the moment it occurred to her that he *had* been exceedingly polite, and that it might be a prudent thing for her to become such good friends with him that her uncle might see any other arrangement to be impossible. While he was saying to himself :

"She calls me good. Good, forsooth! What would she say if she knew how my father has positively insulted her by his ready-made schemes?"

Aloud he answered :

"It is straining a point to call it mine. It belonged to your ancestors."

She made a gesture of impatience.

"At any rate, your presence graces it. I never have been able to forget the first day when I had the happiness of meeting you in it."

She shrugged her shoulders more impatiently still. Indignant as she was at the idea that love could be a bargain in which souls were to be bartered—instead of being a blessing and a mystery, a lightener of human woes, a helper of human sympathy—it seemed to her as if his last sentence had not been invented on the impulse of the moment, but had been drawn out of a store of ready-made compliments.

There was a pause. She looked at him with a proud, hurt look, and then she said :

"Oh, this is too much! It is all very well if you are in fun, paying compliments to my birth and that sort of thing. But why do you find out this exactly this morning?"

"Find out what?"

But a few moments before he had made the plunge with a sense of elation rather than despair. And now she looked at him with an incredulous and disdainful air, contracting herself into as small a compass as possible, as if she could not bear to stand near to him on the same path.

"Why—that—the place—is graced by my presence, and that—that—you will never forget, and all that nonsense. Why do you say what you do not mean?"

"I know I made a clumsy attempt to express my feelings. You may meet some one else another day who will be more fluent."

"A few days ago I might have believed you—but *now*"—with a flush of indignation, and a look of cold dismissal in her eyes—"I know more about it than I did yesterday."

"How so?"

There was a gruff emphasis in his voice, as unmusical as the forced tone which he had blamed in hers. He was generally so calm and almost languid in his manner, that there was something constrained even in his excitement.

"You know," was all she would deign to say.

"I beg you to explain yourself."

"To what purpose?" she asked, drily. "Oh, I don't like all this sort of sophistication any more than you do yourself—I can't endure it. I don't want mere glib phrases—compliments to which I have never been used. But, if I were to speak out, you would not like it. There are more urgent matters for you to attend to than listening to my explanations. The cries of the poor—who are ground down on this estate—might reach your ears, and, if you are so rich, you might help *them*. The reputed landowner is my uncle, the rightful one is your father. My uncle is powerless to help the suffering which he is condemned to witness. He is tied hand and foot, and not allowed to interfere. My ancestors could do little enough to alleviate the growing misery, but, at any rate, they were not grasping landlords, unfairly trying to raise the rental of the land—not almost more cruel than slave-owners, in considering their own profits to such an extent as to drive the old families off the estate. They ask mercy of your father, and he has absolutely refused. He rules with a rod of iron—in *your* interests, as I am told."

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE he could draw his breath to answer her, she was gone. The sudden passion had dismayed herself almost as much as Godfrey. She had been brooding on these things for weeks, and now the fire which her musing had kindled had suddenly flamed up, though she had thought it well covered in. She had delivered herself of her sentiments with curiously mixed feelings of guiltiness, and yet of having done her duty. She told herself that she had been right to stop a pretence at unreal devotion which was derogatory to her, and that she would continue to stop it in the future, whatever it might cost. Her

natural protector, her uncle, had placed her in a false position. She was purposeless and defenceless, and had wildly attempted to turn the man's thoughts in a contrary direction. Her knowledge of his disposition had helped her to guess that the sarcasm with which she left him would tell upon him more or less.

"It can't be the case," he said to himself. "My father is a partially uneducated man, like all men who have had to make their own way in life ; but the very fact that he has risen would prevent him from acting like a brute."

At the same moment the thought occurred to him that Miss Rashleigh would not have made the insinuation had it not contained at least a modicum of truth, and that it was just possible that men like his father might be tempted to despise and tread down those from whom they had risen, looking upon society—as some savages do—as a struggle for the survival of the strongest.

"It will be easy for me to test the thing myself," he muttered—feeling for the moment no longer like a love-sick swain, but like a man who had talked, in high-sounding words, grandly about ideals, and had been caught by a girl in a dereliction of duty, which was fatuous as well as arrant. For, if his father had been making a mistake about his mode of dealing with his poorer neighbours, surely a word or a hint would be sufficient to pull him up, and it was the part of the son to give such a hint.

"And I never took the trouble to inquire, though all the money is to come to me," thought Godfrey to himself, as a hot wave of colour rose to his cheek when he remembered that, in the case of the boy who had been blamed for gathering flowers, he had been told that the child's father was an ordinary farm-labourer, who, for the support of himself and a wife and eight children, received about ten shillings a week.

"I am shamed by a girl. No doubt she thinks I must be a selfish scoundrel not to inquire if there are others in such a plight, and not to see that such pay must be thoroughly inadequate for the support of human beings," he reflected.

A couple of hours before, Godfrey had been speculating—as it was his habit to speculate about all sorts of things—as to whether it would be better to have one's own happiness spread out in a mild way, like gold beaten into a leaf, over a series of years, or to enjoy the very essence of it in one period like a big nugget. But now the thought which principally occupied his impressionable mind was no longer whether he should be able to say: "I have had my golden time of this blessing of life. I have fulfilled some ambition, or I have known the truest sympathy in the love of some faithful heart." It was: "Would

the happiness be worth calling by that name if it were at the expense of the misery of others? Shall I add one more to the lackadaisical wretches who are whining, as Carlyle says, to be 'hap-happy'?"

The day was still hot and heavy when he set out for an unusual walk of investigation among the cottages of the labourers and the smaller farms. Bees were still burying themselves in the hearts of flowers and sucking the golden nectar, whilst grasshoppers like tiny acrobats leaped on the blades of grass. In the wilderness a blind-worm—innocuous and beautiful—was stretching his snaky length close to the box of paints and unfinished water-colour sketch which Godfrey had forgotten. He was hurrying from cottage to cottage to detect if possible some weak point in what had seemed to him almost a cruel accusation of his father.

What did he find? My reader, I am not going to weary you with descriptions which might fill a book instead of a chapter. The wages of labourers in that district varied from eight to nine shillings a week, and there was scarcely any space for kitchen garden allotted with the cottages of the tenants.

Sir Ralph Rashleigh's agent, when he could afford to keep an agent, had always attempted to rectify the poverty-stricken condition of the estate by increasing the size of the large farms on it, and by throwing into them the plots of ground which had previously been used as kitchen or potato gardens for the peasantry.

By degrees, as we know, these farms had been mortgaged and had passed into the hands of the owner of Broadmeads. Sir Ralph had long since ceased to keep an agent, but Reuben Sellwood employed no less than two, who in the opinion of his son deserved to be compared with jackal purveyors to the hungry needs of the king lion.

"Why, when my father has so much already, should he be continually hankering after more?" thought the young fellow, as he plodded home that evening, fagged and sorely perplexed, a sadder and a wiser man, but with no solution to the riddle.

He had come to the conclusion that the want most severely felt in the neighbourhood was more cottages. Those which he had seen were badly built and badly drained—built on the mud and with rubbish scarcely better than mud for their rickety walls. The overcrowding was horrible, and yet, as one of the agents had suggested, there was nothing to prevent Reuben Sellwood from building on some of those thousands of acres of moor or common which Reuben had bought up by degrees, a small portion of which would have served as an admirable site for cottages. Godfrey had seen meagre-looking, ill-fed

children who could not be fed upon milk, because milk in the larger farms was reserved for cream and cheese, the greater part of the buttermilk being given to the pigs.

What was to be done? Godfrey had been occupied in teaching some of the choir boys to sing, and had never informed himself as to the rags which they wore under the surplices so pleasing to look at on Sundays. He had been so far from intending to neglect his duties as a future landlord that he was full of new plans about agriculture, and had intended to open a working men's club in which it might be possible to give the working-man some philosophic insight into the mysteries of the universe.

But—dreamer though he had been—he was compelled to admit that at present he had nothing to do with theories; he had to keep to realities. Civilisation itself, if such realities are allowed to continue, would soon become impossible. On passing through one of the village slums, Godfrey's attention had been attracted by the dirty face of one of the lads, who looked very different in his surplice on a Sunday, and who formed one of a small crowd of little children collected round a narrow doorway. He had always fancied that this lad was sickly, and his conscience smote him as, stooping under a doorway, he passed into the interior of the cottage, and was invited to seat himself on the old arm-chair, which served the "gudeman," and was apparently the only article worthy the name of a chair that stood on the broken stones of the floor. Boxes and three-legged stools seemed to suffice for the accommodation of the other members of a large family. And on a miserable pallet a dying woman lay groaning, with no one to minister to her wants, or alleviate her suffering. Godfrey, forcing himself to conquer his distaste to the surroundings, sat down beside her, trying with his own hands to raise her head, while he posted an urchin in one direction after the doctor, and another to the village shop to purchase nourishment.

Alas! it was but one case among many, and this dreamer—who had pictured peasant-life to himself as a romantic and interesting thing—heard for the first time the details of a modern wretchedness and degradation, in which it seemed to him that the progress of a thousand years had done little to raise the condition of the labourer either mentally or physically. His heart waxed hot within him, and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. Not one of the members of this household ever tasted animal food except as a rare indulgence, and the wife had been compelled to supply the place of the too luxurious bakers' bread by her own rough baking of a coarser meal.

It took a good deal to rouse Godfrey into indignant action,

but he forgot his own mortifications as he made his way late in the evening through the slush of unmended roads, and passed another cottage where some sick creatures were huddled together over the embers of a miserable fire. It made him irritable to see the afflictions of the people. There might be improvidence or other hostile circumstances which accounted for such a state of penury. But, if it were so, they must be taught better. He was shocked at what he had seen, and determined forthwith to remonstrate with his father.

Where should he seek him? Not in the room which he had hitherto been told was to be kept for "business purposes," and from which Godfrey began to shrink with a new horror of the deeds of cruelty which for the first time he imagined had emanated from it. There had been a sort of understanding between the father and the son that the latter should have nothing to do with "business."

This room had been built out from the main building, so that the villagers could have access to it through a back door opening on the common. Reuben, who was careful to separate anything that savoured of work from the atmosphere of his new and luxurious home, had spent no money on the adornment of this apartment. It might have been a room in the backwoods from its appearance, so bare and unfurnished was it. At a large deal table, on which stood a plain desk and a large glass inkstand, the agent on certain days was seated. Those were the days on which the cottagers, whose rents were not forthcoming, were summoned before him and threatened with eviction, and when Mr. Newton, having received directions from his master, spoke to them in a harsh, rasping voice, and refused to hear the complaints of those who said that the soil was meagre, and that only the barest subsistence could be wrung from it. Mr. Newton himself owned a house with four bare matter-of-fact walls and plate-glass windows a little outside the grounds, and preserved his dignity as an official by having a separate entrance up a staircase, which had been made for the purpose, to this chamber of horrors.

The very aspect of the place was distasteful to Godfrey. He hated it as much as he hated the agent's house. To his excited fancy, it seemed as if there was a sinister contrast between the velvet arm-chair in which one man, with his eyebrows drawn together and a harsh expression of face, was accustomed to sit in state, and the cane-bottomed chairs, ranged in a corner opposite, on which others were used to await their doom. He had had an interview with Mr. Newton, the agent, in the so-called "business" room, and the information gained during that interview was certainly not reassuring.

Newton was low-browed, with small, penetrating eyes. He

himself had to toil like a mill-horse through the weary months of the year, and found it so hard to ensure a day's holiday for himself or his wife and children, that he could not be expected to have much sympathy for the people who lived in a state of squalor, and were exposed to a few more physical hardships. For him, as for the labourers with whom he had to deal, there was little prospect of rest on this side the grave. Each had to drive the bargain which was best for himself. Each was a sad specimen of the hopelessness of the lot of the ordinary working-man, the few alleviations which were to be allowed to him in reward for his thrift. Newton was perhaps, after all, the most to be pitied, as all the "dirty work" fell to his share. And, as he repeated a few of his experiences, it seemed to Godfrey as if the very atmosphere of the room was impregnated with hopeless heart-burnings, useless strivings, and tales of despair. The pendulum of the large clock which stood on the mantelpiece seemed to echo the refrain of one of Longfellow's rather hackneyed, but very popular poems, "For ever, never—never, for ever!"

Was it true, he asked himself with some revulsion of feeling, that his father showed the worst side of his nature in his treatment of the people from whom he had risen?—true that Reuben, who must know the misery of such a state of things himself, could be content for these people to lead swinish, miserable, disconsolate lives, while he and his were to fare luxuriously, and be clothed in purple and fine linen?

"I have something to say to you — something rather important. Can you give me five minutes?" he asked his father, a few days afterwards, when he met Reuben strolling in the grounds of Broadmeads. "Just a few minutes' conversation?"

"Half-an-hour or more, if you like it, my lad," answered the elder man, somewhat pleased at the new sign of cordiality on the part of the younger.

He did not notice that Godfrey was pale with mysterious fears, and that there was a heavy-hearted look about him as he tried to assume his usual manner, stopping every now and then to call attention to some new beauty in the wilder part of the park. Unconsciously his footsteps always strayed to the older part of the property, and he felt as if it would be easier for him to speak on a painful subject in this sheltered nook, with the sun gleaming through the interstices of waving boughs of trees, and with fern-like moss beneath his feet, than it would have been in the fuller light and more invigorating air which blew keenly on the open moors, whispering to him of hope and aspiration, and of all that was ideal within his own mind.

Something in the expression of his face, and the evident

difficulty which he had in opening up the conversation, led Reuben to ask :

"What has gone wrong with ye? Could ye not tell me as well when we meet at dinner?"

"Hardly, before the footmen, who are always standing about and staring at us," answered Godfrey, with his impulsiveness already somewhat dashed by the sight of the hard and impenetrable face. "I want to talk to you about some of these poor wretches who seem to have such a difficulty in keeping the wolf of something like famine from their doors. They are hungry, and want food. If we do nothing to help them, it seems to me they will be bound to do something to help themselves."

"Humph," said Reuben, surveying his son with a long stare of bewilderment. "Who's been a-fooling you with this over-drawn picture? Tak' my advice. It's evident you've not been brought up to business. Would it not be better for you to keep to your paint-box, and yer fiddle, and——"

"My other toys," hotly responded the young fellow. "No, I think that I have been wrong to allow myself to be lumped with that half of the world, which is so indifferent to the struggles of the other half. I am not a child to be content with toys."

"Ah—h," said Reuben, giving him another stare. It was an effective and deeply guttural interjection, which seemed to Godfrey to imply : "Are you sure of that?"

To do the father justice, he was sorry directly he had uttered it. He had not intended to betray the cynicism which he generally controlled in the presence of his son. But Godfrey was easily moved. He hated everything which approached a scene ; and the perspiration stood on his forehead as he awoke to the thought of how difficult it would be to keep his temper now that the moment had arrived when he would be forced to put questions to his father, and expect to have them answered. It was not only that from his childhood he had stood in something like awe of this iron man—obeying him to avoid discussion, and hedged-in by an authority which he had occasionally hated—but he began to wonder how he ever could have been so carried away by his emotions as to be sanguine enough to imagine he could accomplish any purpose by demanding an account of his father.

"Perhaps you think it weak-minded of me to be shocked and horrified—in an age when we have heard so much of material advancement and the strides of civilisation—to find human beings living on our own estate much as they might have lived in—in—the days of Noah."

It was rather an anti-climax to a speech which he had

commenced a little grandly, and it did not improve matters that Reuben laughed.

But Godfrey had avowedly a horror of rhetoric, and continued, more quietly:

"I mean that there is no sign whatever of progress—the commonest drainage and tillage—the merest creature-comforts are wanting."

"Well, and whose fault is it?" answered Reuben, gruffly. "If they are content to live in the mud, let 'em live in it, but let 'em remember that they have to thank the Rashleighs for it. *Who* ground 'em down to the mud, I should like to know?"

He stopped short at the brink of his own conclusion as he asked the question. It passed through his mind with a grim sense of humour that he ought to know much more about the inequalities of human existence—with life at one extreme and life at another practically two different things—than this young fellow who had been so delicately reared. No one needed less than Reuben to have the painful features of that struggle for existence exaggerated. He knew little of science, and would have been a good deal surprised if the "evolutionists" had told him that the same struggle went on with fearful acuteness in the air, the water, the woods, and even the grass. But he perfectly comprehended that amongst human beings that process which is described as the "survival of the fittest," and which had brought himself uppermost, must relegate others to comfortless homes and lower conditions of life. He was not good at speaking, and could not help being aware that the deduction would not be so clear to his son's mind as it was to his own, that the people in the neighbourhood were suffering from the tyranny of successive generations of Rashleighs. He despised them for having so long submitted to the old *régime*, which imposed inequalities of a certain kind between man and man, but at the same time he saw no occasion to bother himself about the vast gulf which must inevitably exist between poverty and wealth. It was fair that the man, who, by dint of his own energy and labour, had struggled out of the mud, should exact his due from the tadpoles who remained in it, and who had made no effort to help themselves.

Godfrey did not answer. How could he tell his father that he not only sympathised with the suffering creatures, but was an ardent propagandist of new opinions against which the old traditions, that had been thought absolute, would have to be defended? English or Irish people had never as yet dreamt of finding out the use of dynamite or petroleum, but it had dawned upon the minds of a few of the more advanced Radicals that wealth, such as that which Reuben had accumulated, and which he looked upon as a means of enjoyment for his descendants,

might in due time have to be shared more or less by the people.

"Well, my time is important," said the older man after a pause. "When ye've done dreamin', I'm ready to listen. I suppose this is what comes of all the Latin and Greek. Never mind. I deny ye nothink. Have you been gettin' into debt? Are yer pockets full enough?"

The allusion was unfortunate. The fact that luxury, diverted to the production of superfluities, was depriving the people of necessities—was hanging like a millstone of ignominy round the young man's neck. He hated to be lapped in swan's-down, and fed, as he thought, on sugarplums, whilst others were toiling and ground down. The thought seemed to choke him, and make it difficult for him to find his power of articulation.

"My allowance is too large," he answered, a little sharply. "Make it a quarter of what it is, and build the labourers better cottages."

The sound of Reuben's long, low whistle was not calculated to allay the young man's growing irritation, nor the increasing feeling that he wanted to get the yoke of this wealth from his neck, and dash it, if need be, in somebody's face.

"What exaggerated nonsense you young chaps git into your heads," answered the father, a little roughly. "I tell ye, if the soil *is* bad, it's their dooty to make it better. But you speak of what you don't know. How can you—as a stranger—be acquainted with the facts?"

"It seems to me, it becomes my duty to acquaint myself with the facts, if—if this property is at any time to come to me."

Reuben laughed bitterly.

"I've told you that *I* am not responsible for the state of the cottages. Let the curse light on them as built them. Meanwhile, if ye want to impress me wi' the elevation o' yer character—go, like the French princess, and feed folks with buns."

"Out of my allowance? It is not charity they want, though some of them are starving, and one at least down with fever."

"Humbug!" retorted Reuben, with some attempt at a sneer, though he had not the faintest appreciation of what his son was driving at. "Why will you put your oar into affairs which don't concern ye?"

Godfrey thought again; this time in a state of despair.

Was there any means by which he could make his very different theories intelligible to his father? Things which were hackneyed platitudes to him, would be incomprehensible para-

doxes to the more untaught mind of Reuben. At last he said, speaking slowly :

"You were just now saying about these unfortunate creatures, why couldn't they be content to live like their forefathers, in what you called the mud? Their forefathers, for instance, were accustomed to empty pails of water into the gutters, and to let the cocks and hens strut into their houses ; and their lives were supposed to be undisturbed pastorals. These people are a good deal like them, except for the pastoral part of it—their lives seem to be more like tragedies. I hate to see men who are pinched and broken down, and who look as if they are systematically underfed till they have no strength to stand together, and help each other against the tyranny of—of the upper classes."

He stopped. The hatching of any sort of eggs is supposed to require some genial warmth. There should be an atmosphere of some sort of sympathy, instead of freezing indifference in the hearer. The cold expression of Reuben's face seemed to say : "Don't meddle with me. There is so much that is visionary and unpractical about you young fellows, that it is only a waste of time to listen to all your nonsense."

He was much tempted to say, aloud, "Fiddle-de-dee!" but mastered himself by an effort, only betraying his increasing vexation by the twitching of his hands, and the restless crossing and recrossing of his legs.

Godfrey continued, now a little hesitatingly :

"There are hundreds of acres of untilled land, as I understand, belonging to your estate. Why should we suffer from the effects of a large population congested on a small area of ground?"

Then spake out Reuben :

"The cottages will do well enough. I belong to the common ruck of matter-of-fact men, and I don't understand new-fangled ideas. As I told ye before, they are out o' your beat. If you're a wise chap, you'll stick to your own concerns."

Sheer desperation forced the lad to speak out more plainly.

"My facts are true enough. At least you can allow me to acquaint myself with the details of what it seems is some day to be my own calling. I can't deal with men as if I were not responsible for my dealings—and you—if—if—*your* good name is spoken against, don't you suppose that I suffer?" he asked, turning a little paler and unconsciously dropping his voice.

Then for the first time the passion and feeling as well as the latent coarseness, which were ordinarily concealed beneath the marble coldness of Reuben's demeanour, burst forth, making him dash his hand heavily on the table.

"My good name be d—d," he cried, to his son's astonish-

ment. "Do you think I should care one jot if all the devils in hell were to speak against me? Go and paint your flowers and play your fiddle. *I* make the money, and it is you who spend it."

"I wish you did not make it. We should have been happier without it."

"You think so?" he said, ironically.

"Yes, money is not everything."

"Then perhaps you would rather I did not make you my heir?"

Godfrey had anticipated the question, and already his active mind had been planning schemes of domestic economy, and thinking how delightful it would be to combine "plain living and high thinking," and to manage artistically on a moderate income. He had always hated his father's lavish and ostentatious expenditure, and had been secretly exasperated by unnecessary display. But now he began quite to pity the people who were rich and who could have no opportunity of practising economies.

"Money is not everything," he tried to explain, forgetting for the moment the feeling of constraint which had prevented him from expounding his schemes to one who would not understand them. "But in this case it will enable us to take down those cranky, tumble-down cottages and build new ones on better sanitary principles. I have no wish to demoralise the people or to loosen the bonds of society—it is no part of my programme to move too fast, but to encourage better relations between landlords and tenants, and not to give our neighbours stones when they have a right to ask for bread. Let us teach them to help themselves. Why shouldn't there be associations of manual labourers—co-operation if you like to call it so—don't *we* have co-operation? Why shouldn't they have higher wages, and better articles for the small amount of money doled out as wages?"

Once launched on his pet ideas, he had almost forgotten his usual reticence of speech till he was roused by a stentorian voice, which made him instinctively put his hands to his ears and long to remind his father that it was not necessary for him to exert a voice of apparently unlimited power.

"What kind of man do you take me for?" cried Reuben, rising from his chair as if he found the conversation unsupportable, and beginning with hurried steps to parade the room. "I don't want you to be one of those dutiful, obedient sons who say 'Amen' to all that their fathers want, but I expect ye to understand that these sort o' matters need a lot of experience—it takes a lifetime to git it. Any fool ought to know that money is a force, a force given to the fellow who sweats to git it.

S'pose by pains and a lot o' hard grinding work one o' us has climbed atop o' the tree, ain't he a right to hev' his wages for what he hev' done? Ain't it a good thing for such as him that there are a precious lot of idiots in the world who will never do the thing he has done? Every capitalist will tell ye as business is business. Sentiment may do for such as you. I don't say as it mayn't be right in its way. But clap it into a separate compartment and keep it there."

Godfrey was silent again. His eyes were being opened by degrees. Reuben—in desiring to assert himself, and to force his boy back again into that tacit submission which had been his normal state—was unconscious of the sting which lay hidden in his words. Was not every man naturally a labouring animal, and was it fitting that the son should be so entirely dependent on the father? Godfrey, whose sensibilities were so easily made to smart, and who had not felt the gall before, was beginning to chafe under it.

The new sensation was the more intolerable because Reuben, in the loss of his good-humour, had not been able to keep up the thin veneer of social polish—for the aping of which a good deal of reserve had been necessary—but appeared for the first time in a new phase of bullying coarseness.

"Well," he said, looking discontentedly at his son's troubled face, "we are coming to the end of our half-hour. It's a precious long five minutes. You've had your say, and done wi' it. You may be clever enough, but your training don't fit ye for threshing out these sort o' questions. You don't know the world, and, natural like, ye don't allow for the whinings of the foxes who've got to put up with the green grapes. How preciously happy ye ought to be, with everything as you can think of provided for ye. I have never felt like that. I've got to wonder what it feels like."

"Ah! there's the pity of it," said Godfrey, beneath his breath. "How much better it would have been if I had been allowed to toil for myself!"

For the first time in his life he felt a sort of indignity in the fact that he had been devoted, as it were, to ceremonial purposes.

"Why did he give me a first-class education if his only object was to boast of it, and to make me feel the pinch of it in not being able to betake myself to any of the pursuits which are supposed to be incompatible with the elegant repose of a University man?" he thought to himself.

"It is altogether a false position," he said, aloud, as he listened in a sort of stupor to Reuben's surly words.

The room had seemed to grow darker as, one by one, his illusions had been demolished by the pitiless blows of this

ill-mannered Iconoclast. A feeling of disgust—almost of repulsion—seemed to be clutching like a hand at Godfrey's throat, and rendering it impossible for him to make any further efforts to modify the opinions which probably nothing would ever alter.

"Humph! I've astonished ye," said Reuben, seating himself in his arm-chair, and indulging in a chuckle. "You've been too long like that fine Greek lady, shut up in a tower. If you'd had to work as I have, you would have known all the ins-and-outs of business long before this."

Godfrey put up his hand with a movement which was instinctive. He had no idea of opening his heart just then to his father, but the latter saw that he had gone too far.

"Well, never mind—it was not your fault if you were born with the tastes of the haristocracy." (Reuben very rarely aspirated his vowels, and the slip at which his son started was caused by his excitement.) "You'll be as rich as any lord among 'em."

"I wish the lords were not so rich," was a retort on Godfrey's tongue. But he checked it, remembering how once in the Union, when some man had ventured on such an observation, there was a cry from the Opposition benches, "Rank revolution, sir," the young orator responding, "Revolution, sir—that is the very thing we want." He laughed at the remembrance of the audacious fun, and scarcely followed his father as the latter continued :

"You'll be only young once. It is I who've made the golden eggs, and you who'll have to spend 'em. That'll be better than mooning about and wasting your time on Virgil's idles."

"Virgil never wrote idylls ; perhaps you are thinking of Theocritus?"

"I thought you wanted to be like one o' his shepherds—I read it in a translation."

"I'm not much like a Virgilian shepherd," answered Godfrey, with a faint smile. "And, as to my poetry, you do your best to cure me of it. The day is a long way off, I imagine, when my ears will be gladdened with the triumph of fame, or that 'softer, social fluting' which might perhaps cost me money. Meanwhile, I have more than enough to spend on myself."

"You have more than enough," echoed Reuben, opening his eyes. "You're the first youngster I ever heard say so. If you hang back in that way, you'll make me think you're in debt. Why, if you'd like to live like a Monty what-d'ye-call-it, I'd find the way to let you do it! You don't go in for enough 'shine,' as the Spaniards have it. Be always the best-dressed man in the place. That reminds me, there's a new hunter as I want ye to buy. And the carriages—it's not much odds that

we've got one already with a couple of horses," he continued, thinking with some sort of gratification of the obsequious salutations which he had received when he had first startled the country people with his equipages and liveries. "I want ye to drive something-like—something that will cut a splash—a four-in-hand now? What d'ye say to that?" he asked jauntily, reproaching himself for the cloud of anxiety which was settling more and more on the face of his son. "From the time you were a babby, I spared ye nothing—only don't plague me about matters which do not concern ye."

At that moment Godfrey could feel almost grateful to his father for the impassable gulf he was digging between them. There was something in Reuben's tone which sent a shiver through him, and made him feel that it would never be possible to explain that, though he cared little about money, he had not been without ambition—the ambition of standing high in the opinion of his fellow-men, and of doing his best to serve his generation. He got his temper sufficiently under to be able to answer :

"I hope I am perfectly grateful, but I prefer my dog-cart and my horse to a four-in-hand. I don't want to be a Monte Cristo."

Unconsciously as he spoke he put his hands behind his back. To sweep the bank-notes into his pocket, as he was expected to do, would be to enter into a new contract of subservience to Reuben's will, while to refuse him would be to irritate him to no purpose.

"There is Newton. I was expecting him. I must ask you to leave us together," remarked Reuben, with the first humorous expression on his still angry face, as the sound of approaching footsteps roused Godfrey's horror of the agent, and made him retire with a sort of dignified rapidity.

"Ah—I thought as much. I won't stir a peg from my decision. He'll have to learn that I'm master, and can put my foot down as well as any of 'em, in spite of his poet's airs and graces. He's a lot to complain of, with his good eating and drinking, his carriage and his servants. It's a fine thing to have every one bowing down to you when you are young, to have all the money made for you, and not to be asked to soil a finger in workin' for it—a precious nice thing!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"As to the peoples of the American Continent, beginning with the Eskimo and ending with the Terra del Fuegian, we need not say that——"

A fit of coughing interrupted the reader, which might have been accounted for by the cloud of smoke from an old-fashioned meerschaum which Sir Ralph was smoking. He was leaning back lazily in the arm-chair through which the horse-hair protruded in patches, and Vere, who was seated at his feet with a favourite greyhound crouching by her side, looked picturesque enough with her fair colouring thrown out to advantage by the faded tapestry on the walls behind her. The tapestry had once represented knights in hauberks of chain mail and ladies in wimples, but all were indistinguishable now in consequence of the depredations of moths and general mouldiness.

She cleared her throat and began again:

"We need not say that the Continent was peopled from the west by continuous immigration, and the various tribes became strongly differentiated, in language and customs, by living widely apart, and always in a state of——"

A series of sharp little barks interrupted her again.

Vere was not sorry for the interruption. She had been reading for more than an hour, and was as tired as the dog of the newspaper and magazine reading so constantly inflicted on her without any deference to her tastes in the choice of a subject. Yet the girl never complained. Her voice rose and fell as mechanically as before, till Sir Ralph exclaimed irritably: "Put the creature out," in the somewhat harsh voice to which his niece had become accustomed.

"He meant no harm," she said, as she rose and opened the door.

The silence of the long, barely-furnished corridor — the atmosphere of which seemed to be full of romantic and historical interest — seemed to be rudely disturbed by the hoarse barks of the delighted animal, as she led him through it to the outer door, and gazed for one moment at the pale, familiar stars of the dear, homely, English sky which had taken their places, like sentinels, for the night. She gave a sigh of relief, as she had just time to nod at the Great Bear, Cassiopeia, and the Polar star, as if they had been old friends, to whom she could confide her secrets while she drew in fresh breaths of the outer

air—sweet with the odours of the tangled flowers and the smell of damp earth.

Rain had fallen during the day, and she had been kept closer than usual to her increasingly difficult task of amusing her uncle. Sir Ralph was now often irritable. His normal temperament seemed to have changed. But she preferred a little artillery thunder—flashes of anger, which might perhaps clear the air—to the vagueness with which he had hitherto answered her whenever she had inquired concerning his affairs.

She guessed that there was some important reason, kept in the background now, which if explained to her, might excuse his increasing irritability. But she could not know that he was brooding over what had seemed to him to be the vulgar condescension of a letter received from Reuben *afropos* of herself that very morning, and that the indignity of being patronised by his upstart neighbour, and of feeling that there was no means of escaping from his clutches, was maddening him, while he pretended to be interested in the "Eskimo."

She returned to the room, and seated herself again in her old attitude, reading in a voice which she tried to make less listless.

"“Their physical peculiarities bespeak a common origin, and their differences——”"

"There—that will do," said her uncle, abruptly. "Your wits are wool-gathering."

It was true that her manner was dispirited, and that her voice, which was usually as refreshing as a clear stream of water, had become monotonous; true, also, that the expression of her face alarmed him a little. There was a look of unconquerable will which crept into it at times, and reminded him that Vere had possibly inherited from the Rashleighs a temper which made against absolute perfection, and a strenuous hate of injustice apt to break into a flame.

She said nothing to excuse herself now, but answered by a scarcely perceptible movement of the eyebrows, as she laid down the book, and stood upright, looking across at her uncle interrogatively, with no piteous expression in her face, but with an entire absence of that fine, childlike mirth which she knew how to combine on other occasions with her underlying seriousness.

Sir Ralph had no key to the girl's thoughts, though he believed that he had a remarkably profound knowledge of womankind in general. He had often lamented, even in her presence, that his own daughter had not been a son, who could have helped him with the difficult task of his life. A boy, who could have been churned into some sort of shape by rough

treatment in a public school, would have been able to grapple with the stern realities before him. But of what use were maids? and this niece alarmed him with her large amount of undeveloped power, and her readiness to assert herself, even in a comparatively immature stage of womanhood.

"It is a pity I could never afford to let her have a proper governess, and be trained like other girls," he thought, as she stood looking at him expectantly, with the large, dark-blue eyes which seemed to have lost their serio-playfulness.

He could guess that the spirit of opposition in her temperament, with which he had sometimes to deal, possessed her now as she stood before him—taller and fairer than any golden-centred lily that had grown in the outside garden, with a hazy lustre from the candle-light on her delicately-tinted hair.

"Beautiful as a whole," he said discontentedly to himself, yet with no certainty that her beauty would continue, since no one feature, as a question of perfection of lines, could be called absolutely correct. He prided himself on his well-formed taste, and could be cynically critical even of his brother's child. He knew that the little feminine methods of other women were hateful to this girl, that duplicity in others made her angry, and that, if ever on previous occasions there had been a difference of opinion between them, she had preferred to go straight to the mark. A recollection of such encounters made him a little afraid of the level, fronting eyes, and all his cut and dried maxims *à la* Rochefoucauld seemed to be dispersed. He was apparently bestowing his attention on the amber end of his meerschaum as Vere said suddenly, in a voice which struck sharply on his ears, and threatened to make him lose his presence of mind:

"It hurts me that you should treat me with so little confidence."

"How so?"

He kept his eyes fixed on his pipe, and considered how it would be possible to make her understand that the want of confidence of which she complained had in reality been the instinctive concealment of the disquietude which he had begun to feel respecting her.

How much better it would have been for this uncomfortable project of his, if his niece had been like most girls of her age—with a mind like a sheet of white paper on which he might transcribe all that suited his purpose—instead of being a young woman of many theories, sometimes dogmatic in spite of her simplicity.

"Why are you so short with me?"

"So short!"

"I mean so cold—so irresponsible. I know you have some-

thing weighing on you now. Why cannot you open your heart to me?"

Sir Ralph did not speak for some moments. When he did so, he parried her answer with another.

"I thought you would have a definite announcement to make very soon to *me*. By the way, you are twenty, are you not?"

"Yes, uncle, but——"

"It is natural I should be desirous to know how matters stand. I hope you are not going to visit the father's sins upon the very inoffensive son. It is, as I said before, an absurdity for you to talk of marrying a man who has not plenty of money. Whoever has *you*, must expect to pay a heavy price for your hand."

A crimson colour rushed to her temples. Hitherto she had been proud of her uncle, because she had considered him so perfect a gentleman. But now it seemed incredible that he who had so often been cold, who had refused to notice her or appreciate her, should be so ready for his own purposes to scheme for this marriage. There was a point at which she must assert her human rights. She was determined to tell him that she would have nothing to do with a scheme in which she was to be used by a rich man as one of his levers. She had never heard much of the claims for women's emancipation, but a chord had been struck in her nature which suddenly began to vibrate. A whole category of women's rights seemed to be ready for assertion, as something of defiance blazed up in her flaming cheeks. She had determined to tell her uncle that she had nothing of that false sentiment which made other girls ready to offer themselves as a sort of filial holocaust; that she would rather continue to exercise any amount of thrift than marry for the sake of living objectless, luxurious days; and that she had fortunately not been educated in the benighted times when young women could be treated like dolls and kept in ignorance of all sorts of things which were necessary for them to know.

But all her words forsook her at the crisis. The dilating of her nostrils and the tightening of her hands, as if she would plunge the nails into their delicate palms, betrayed something of the inward tumult of her feelings. She hated herself for the strong, ungovernable anger which seemed to sweep over her, making her shiver and feel fevered when she needed all her courage, and felt it necessary to assume the unruffled calm of a philosopher.

She choked back the rising tears, and said, in a tone of inquiry which she attempted to keep steady:

"Our fortunes must have fallen low indeed?"

It was *she* now who was the inquisitor, and was unconsciously applying the torture-screw. The moisture stood on Sir Ralph's forehead as he answered, also dropping his voice :

"So low that the ordinary reason for such a match is quadrupled."

She had expected some such announcement, but received it in blank silence. Her uncle gained courage as she stood pondering. There was something of his old manner *de haut en bas* which had always somewhat fretted her, as he added, in explanation :

"It seems that our family history has a romantic interest for these people. The son cannot do without you."

Her eyes flashed, and she put up her hand as if warning him to be silent.

"He told you so himself?" she asked.

"His father did. Come, you must be reasonable. Reuben Sellwood is a good sort of fellow up to his lights. Only a little more plain-spoken than we are in our world, you know. But, after all, what he says is the truth."

He began to talk rapidly about mortgages, unfortunate investments, and the tendency of other people's money to accumulate like an avalanche. He risked cheerful prognostications as if to convince himself. He did not think his niece capable of not being able to rise to the emergency. He comforted himself by reflecting that she was too healthy to develop nervous fancies and morbid humours.

She stood as if turned into stone. It might have been for want of something to say. He supposed that his revelations must have overruled her scruples, but saw that no good was to be gained by continuing the conversation.





Part IV.

She rose,
As in the act to speak. The sudden thought,
And unconsidered impulse led her on. Yet anon
With recollections clear, august, sublime,
Of God's great truth and right immutable,
Which as obedient vassals to her mind,
Came summoned by her will.

CLOUGH.

CHAPTER I.



MEANWHILE, after the unusual curiosity and excitement caused by the arrival of the mysterious owner of Broadmeads, Tarringmoor and its environs had relapsed into something like dulness.

Not only did Reuben Sellwood remain an enigma, but the "son of the millionaire," as Godfrey was called, seemed to be likely to prove as disappointing as his father.

Godfrey's appearance had been pronounced pleasing to the eye, and his manners, though somewhat reserved, had been said to be those of a gentleman. But he too showed a provoking inclination to prefer the pieces of symbolic pasteboard, left at Broadmeads with a view to making his acquaintance, to seeing the people themselves. Some suggested that his pride would be ready to kick at the tone of patronage too likely to be adopted towards him as the son of a *parvenu*, and that it was only natural a young fellow of any spirit should resent the patronising graciousness of the grandees of the neighbourhood. Others had another theory that his health was constitutionally delicate, and that—with the exception of occasionally visiting his club, where he read a good deal, was properly polite, but

made no intimate friendships with any one—he had been condemned by medical advice to lead the life of an anchorite.

It favoured this theory that Godfrey had latterly hidden himself a good deal in his private grounds, preferring to walk rather than to drive, and creeping out like the owls and bats to visit the cottages in lanes and fields. Some surmised that his tastes were “decidedly low,” quoting proverbs, which were not the most refined, to prove that the ears of swine were not convenient material for the manufacture of silk purses, and that that which was bred in the bone would be sure to come out in the blood. The inventive skill of the Tarringmoor folks was really most interesting on this occasion. It showed a love for fiction latent in the feeblest imaginations. But not only were the cleverest people in Tarringmoor beating their heads ineffectually against the closed door of a mystery—Godfrey found himself puzzling over it also.

If Vere Rashleigh hated his father, as it was natural under the circumstances that she should hate him, the filial relationship on his part remained obligatory. With all Reuben’s faults, the fact still remained that he *was* his father. Reuben had not advanced one step to meet him in any of his benevolent projects. Godfrey was checkmated and ashamed. Though Mr. Sellwood had gloried in giving money to certain subscriptions that his name might figure on printed lists, sooner or later the fact must become known that the people who came under his pitiless rule were made to crawl and kneel in the miry clay, at the foot of a most degraded Mammon. The desperate obstinacy which possessed Reuben in refusing to consult anybody about the management of his property, was as perplexing as his odd determination to humble the pride of the Rashleigh family. In an unguarded moment he had said before his son that he would bring Sir Ralph “on his marrow-bones” before he had done with him. Now, it did not lessen Godfrey’s anxieties that he began for the first time to speculate as to why his father had so skilfully laid his schemes for years to buy up nearly all the territory which had belonged to this particular family. He could not suspect him of any causeless animosity. The desire to purchase an ancestral estate, and to settle down as a landed proprietor among people—who could be taught on which side their bread was buttered, and be compelled to pay some sort of deference to the fabulous wealth of a man whom they might otherwise shun as an upstart—was not so strange as that there should be an ulterior motive affecting the well-being of Sir Ralph Rashleigh and his niece. If any such motive existed, there was the possibility that it might be excusable instead of mean or unworthy, and Godfrey was bound to allow the utmost for this possibility.

Yet the uncertainty was a fruitful source for mental uneasiness.

"And oh, the wretchedness of inheriting this money," he said, more than once to himself, with all the agony of a conscientious nature of which Reuben had not the faintest comprehension. Money, which had been amassed he did not know by what methods. How he wished he could make it flow back into the sources from which it came! Of one thing he was perfectly determined, that he would not be Reuben's accomplice, or take part in any transactions of which he did not thoroughly approve. On another point he had also made up his mind. He would himself visit the sick, and supply the wants of the most needy, and he would do so in such a way as to make the people think that Reuben had given him money for the purpose of relieving their wants.

A dozen schemes and ideas filled his brain, but he would have nothing to do with shifty business morality. All thought of love for Vere had fled for a time before the discovery that he was to be imposed upon her, under circumstances that would be love-destroying. He would take advantage of no woman in a case like that. He would go away, if possible—he would resist the temptation. The bare suspicion that his father intended to use him as a sort of cat's-paw for a scheme which was probably a mean one, made him hot with vexation and shame, and he determined if possible to keep away from Vere.

Half-way between Broadmeads and the town of Tarringmoor—just at this crisis—lived a rich widow of the name of Austin. Whispering and meanness, with underhand dealings of all kinds, were detestable to her. Mrs. Austin was on the shady side of middle-life, and had made the best of her privileges in assuming betimes for herself the kindly prerogatives which are supposed to belong to the "old." Generously modelled, if a trifle too richly coloured, with the large well-shaped hands of a capable woman, famed for her well-managed household and perfect appointments, she had succeeded more than once in putting down unkindly gossip.

Few chattering women, whether belonging to the "county families" or to the more easily cowed Tarringmoor matrons, who could not affirm that they had had "grandfathers," could bear the scrutiny of her steady eyes as she would say :

"Dear me! May I ask to whom all this refers? I am rather confused between the individual and the universal. May I ask if all these observations are to be taken in the general, or if you could vouch for them in a court of law? I have somehow

got into the habit of referring half the talk I hear rather to the neuter than to the masculine or feminine."

Nevertheless, in spite of her common sense, which was sometimes slightly dashed with cynicism, Mrs. Austin had a kindly nature, and prided herself on having deserved on more than one occasion the "*küppel-pelz*," or reward given by our German neighbours to the person who has been clever enough to bring about a match. She was capable, also, of arranging the most heterogeneous blossoms in the same social flower-beds. She was not one of those women from whose tongues endearing epithets fall glibly, but she was fond of young girls, and had a natural liking for young men. She had formed her own somewhat sanguine opinions about the new-comers at Broadmeads, and while she thought that the father needed only a woman's humanising influence to lead him into tractable habits, she concluded that the son was really in frail health, and that he shrank, with the sensitiveness of one who was acutely nervous, from being thrust amongst persons who might either toady him for his money, or whose condescension might irritate his pride.

"We must try to shake him out of it," she said to herself. "But what is one to do? His is the sort of nature which is apt to withdraw altogether into its shell, and to administer a gentle prick would be worse than useless."

Nevertheless, she issued invitations for a garden-party to which the people who remained in the neighbourhood in the month of August were specially invited, not excepting the owner of Broadmeads as well as the county magnates.

"My dear, they will be rather pleased than otherwise to meet each other. I must go through with it now. When once I have placed myself in the position of attempting these sort of experiments, it would be sheer cowardice to back out of it," she answered one of her intimate friends, who reminded her that the owner of Broadmeads not only occasionally muted his h's, but was beginning to have a bad name in the neighbourhood for his undue severity to his poorer tenants. "I make a point of never cutting any one—and never sending any one to Coventry pointedly—it is the worst possible taste. Besides," she added, dropping her voice, "there will be an end to all these innuendoes when Sir Ralph's niece marries, as you will see she will, this Godfrey Sellwood, who is, after all, an uncommon-looking person."

Reuben Sellwood did not accept the invitation. But Mrs. Austin managed to bring her persuasive arts to work so successfully upon Godfrey that he could not without rudeness back out of the quasi-engagement which he formed, for the sake of not being rude to a lady, when she purposely waylaid him on one of his walks in the gloaming.

Meanwhile, the clever woman—who was accustomed to say to the younger friends of her sex, “My dear, you must not gossip,” accompanying the motherly admonition with a little playful tap of her fan—managed to keep the monopoly of kindly chatter to herself, and set the ball going skilfully respecting Godfrey’s devotion to Vere.

“It is no wonder any one should be smitten with that girl with her taking face—a little quaint, perhaps, and with no great regularity of feature, but with a mouth as fresh as a rose-bud, and eyes you can never forget—dark in the centres—but with that colour which they call ‘bleu de roi,’ when you see it in Sèvres china, about the irises—— Although I am stupid to mention it; for, after all, one knows that it is not the looks, but the mind and soul which are of real importance,” would be her invariable peroration.

Mrs. Austin thought a good deal about Vere in the days which intervened before the giving of her garden-party. It was not Miss Rashleigh’s fault, as she was in the habit of remarking, that she should be called “Vere,” which seemed to recall the haughty creature in Tennyson’s poems, and was after all “a senseless sort of name.” “But all these things have a sort of fashion. It is one of the advantages of growing old,” she said, confidentially to one of her friends, smoothing affectionately her few gray hairs, “that I can remember the days when girls were christened ‘Charlotte’ in remembrance of the ‘Sorrows of Werter,’ or ‘Sophia,’ in honour of the ‘Vicar of Wakefield.’”

She was shrewd enough to suspect that something had gone wrong if there had really been any love affair between the two young people, but reminded herself that accessibility was a great point in matters of the heart, and that if the feelings of either had been hurt by the misfortune of possessing mismanaging male guardians rather than sensible mothers, it might be her part to propose some slightly modified arrangement.

CHAPTER II.

GOOD-NATURED Mrs. Austin prided herself on a superstition which prevailed in the neighbourhood that whenever she entertained she was certain to have "Queen's weather."

The sky was blue and the sun was shining when the carriages drew up to her pretty but unassuming house, with abundance of stained glass in the hall, and a mat inscribed "Salve" on the inlaid tiles. There were dogs of all varieties to greet the guests, from a little greyhound, which Landseer would have liked to paint, to a bright-eyed King Charles, whose elegant proportions had been damaged, like those of his mistress, by an inclination to embonpoint. There were sleek horses in the surrounding meadows, and fine Alderneys grazing in the shade. The very maid-servants who presided over the tea and coffee (Mrs. Austin always set her face against the introduction of men-servants into her house) looked trim and well-kept in snowy-white aprons and caps. The lawn was indeed not immaculate of daisies; but the widow loved the "wee, modest, crimson-tipped" flowers, as much as Burns loved them, and always declared that her income did not allow her to vie with her richer neighbours in employing enough gardeners to cut her grass.

The girls whom Mrs. Austin had invited were mostly pleasant and pretty to look at, though in this, as in other matters, the lady scorned to limit herself to inviting the damsels of any particular "set." There were girls of the pensive beauty *rôle*, and girls with a dash of fastness supposed to give a flavour to their talk; girls dressed in quaker-like hues of drab and gray, and others in a brilliancy of tint like tropical birds.

There were plenty of good-looking young fellows, with easy, assured manners, to flirt with them in the intervals of that now by-gone croquet which was then an easy amusement as compared with the harder and less idyllic lawn-tennis. The tennis-player of to-day must be a hundred times more ready, agile, and attentive than her fore-runner of the croquet-field, who could dawdle through a pastime in which balls could be driven at leisure between facile hoops, before all games—including croquet itself—had the misfortune to become over-scientific and fatiguing.

Both Godfrey and Vere instinctively avoided the bait of

croquet. The former had no suspicion that he had to thank his well-meaning hostess—who gave out that he was as good as engaged—for the fact that no one pressed him to take a mallet. In ignorance of this, his meeting with Vere was unexpectedly free from constraint. If he had not felt himself to be quite equal to meeting her on the same footing as before, she on her side tried to show neither vexation or shame-facedness. An acute observer might possibly have guessed that her cheerfulness was somewhat forced, and that the apparent indifference with which she wandered away, in company with one of Mrs. Austin's matronly friends, to the shadier walks of the grounds, was possibly assumed.

When the sun had set—leaving the sky with its blush of pink, and its rifts of pale green light still between the sunset clouds—busy preparations were being made for the evening dance, which was always an important part of the programme at Mrs. Austin's garden-parties. A canvas passage lined with rows of pyramidal azaleas and fanlike palms had been prepared for the refreshments, and led into the house where those guests could retire whose limbs were no longer young enough to desire to keep time to the scraping of fiddle-strings. But under an awning at the head of the lawn were musicians with harps and violins, and strains of a brilliant waltz were intermingled with the rippling of laughter and the chirping of voices as the young people began to dance on the turf. Young and old somehow lingered as the coloured oil lamps which had been hung on the adjacent trees lit up a scene which was as unusual as it was pretty.

"Ah, well, it does not matter, there is plenty of ventilation for us all in the open air," laughed kindly Mrs. Austin, as she noticed that the house was abandoned, "the mixture of all ages gives a charm to the scene—the white locks and the fresh young cheeks—how very much more charming the contrast than the fabled gift of eternal youth. Now, I call it quite pleasant when one grows old oneself to be able to witness the gyrations of the young ones. How does it feel?" she added, turning to Godfrey, "don't you feel as if you are a spirit set free from inconvenient gravitation?—I am afraid that simile of mine is ridiculous rather than sublime," seeing from something in his face that he did not like her choice of long words.

"I confess I am an infrequent dancer," answered the "son of the millionaire," with a touch of that refined hauteur which is supposed to belong to another class.

"Ah, I see," she answered, as she looked significantly at some of the girls, like pretty wax dolls, whose faces wore perpetual smiles and whose voices rose and fell in soft interchange of remark to the men on whose arms they leant as

they floated past them in the dance, "your heart is elsewhere—at your books or with your landscape paintings. What a pity; you look as if you ought to be a good dancer."

Once only had Vere appeared among the dancers, and then the simplicity of her attire had been noteworthy, and had possibly furnished her with a good excuse for speedy withdrawal. But how kind had been the gaze of her bright, clear-looking eyes, how frank and pleasant her gentle forehead, how playful and natural the curves of her rosy lips! Godfrey, watching her more closely, thought he saw a slight change in her—a change that he could not fail to attribute to something which had taken place since their last conversation. He was glad that she at least lived in no atmosphere of conventionality. For he had in one respect been a true son of the people. He had often thought: "How can men bear with all these little airs and graces among girls, this posing and acting, this mincing as they go, as if it were not a world of reality and earnestness, and close to us, even in this very neighbourhood, sorrow, deprivation, misery, sickness, and death?"

He did not mean to be hard on the enjoyment of the other women; but some instinct seemed to drive him to leave the crowded lawn, tired of the shimmer of silk and the rustle of lace, and to loiter in one of the side-walks illuminated with Chinese lanterns in which Vere—with some cloud-like wrap round her head and shoulders—had taken refuge not far from her older chaperon. The seat which she had chosen was close to a mossy bank. A cedar with its velvety branches and a couple of ancient beech-trees overshadowed the seat. Vere's hands were filled with some pretty crimson fungi, and near her stood her late partner, somewhat younger than herself, who had plucked the fungi for her and looked as if he would very much like to renew a conversation.

"Happy boy!" thought Godfrey, with a jealous pang, "there is no barrier between them as there is between us."

"Take care you don't poison yourselves," he said, as he drew near to them. "How is it you have hidden yourself here?"

"I think it is a lovely spot," she said, with one of her bright smiles.

"You are easily contented, you think everything lovely."

"Oh, but this is a dear old place. I have a special fondness for these beeches."

"But is it fair to hide yourself? You are losing all that is going on."

"About a dozen people have been here to look after me. I assure you I am not at all neglected."

Her clear eyes and her still smile did not prevent him from noticing a faint pallor, and that new expression in the face

which seemed to foreshadow something—he knew not what. It was noticeable that he did not ask her to dance—the recollection of his last conversation with her was yet too vivid. But he dropped into the seat beside her as soon as the other man had left, and understood something of the new expression which had puzzled him when she said softly :

“I have heard of your kindness to the Hargreaves.”

“You heard of it?”

“Of course, they told me—didn’t you know I visit them?”

“We can talk of it better to-morrow,” he said, a little impulsively, his heart beating with pleasure at her slight encouragement, “if you will come into the wilderness, as you used to. There are two or three plans I should like to tell you of,” he answered in a low tone, under cover of the semi-darkness.

Nothing apparently had happened, and yet the girl’s heart was stirred by some new antagonism. And the man knew that he dreaded that interview which was to take place on the morrow. It had been revealed to him as if by a lightning’s flash that, because Fate seemed to require of him that he should choose this woman as his wife, the woman’s will would probably be set with all its force and strength in the opposite direction. Dame Fate seemed to be a nuisance, even as far as his own feelings were concerned; she hindered spontaneity, and rubbed the bloom from the thing.

Hours passed. The majority of these foolish young people were still spinning in the dance, while it seemed to ordinary observers that, though Godfrey still lingered in Vere’s proximity, both he and she were in a mood alien to jollity. A few of the dancers, like children tired with sport, were resting in corners of the grounds, or behind the fan-like branches of palms in the canvas passages. Godfrey tried to get a little comfort from the fact that the smile had died on the lips of more than one of Miss Rashleigh’s admirers who had sought her again and again, and who had not unnaturally objected to another man being the witness of their discomfiture.

At the repeated “No, thank you. I am very comfortable here,” the would-be dancers retired altogether, as if unwilling to risk another repulse.

“It is the taint of pride in her blood,” thought Godfrey, who had never seen her under such circumstances before. “Pity that a nature so noble should be contaminated by this detestable pride. Yet it served that last fellow right. He was too self-conscious.”

The chaperon, who knew that Mrs. Austin was interested, and who had been “looking after” Vere to gratify the fancy of her friend,—having been privately assured by the hostess that “she had not brought a lot of people together for nothing,”—

gave much the same account of the girl's treatment of young Sellwood.

"Very snubbing to him," said that lady, by no means disconcerted at the failure of her plan, "but, do you know, they say that is the way in which some of our sex begin—by snubbing the man whom they mean afterwards to favour."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Austin took occasion to saunter in the direction of the secluded walk and that seat by the beeches. She saw for herself, as she afterwards declared, that the lad could at times be very serious and self-contained. Why could he not speak out; she had no patience with him! Her supposed omniscience about the affairs of the heart led her to suppose that the two were at variance, and that it might soon be too late for either of them to practise frankness. Her theory was endorsed by the fact that, when Godfrey rose, Vere bowed to him as calmly as if she had been a young lady of fashion anxious to get out of an engagement with a partner who did not please her.

Unfortunately for the progress of affairs, Mrs. Austin made up her mind to speak to her young friend that night as soon as her other guests had departed. It was easy to put her plan into practice, for Vere—who was occupying a bedroom in Mrs. Austin's house for greater convenience and by special invitation—was sitting at the dressing-table brushing her long fair hair as the elder lady entered, and began to caress the soft silken masses which fell in a shimmer of pale gold below the young girl's waist.

"How long it is!" she said, by way of commencing conversation, and conscious that the blue eyes were gazing at her with an almost defiant expression from beneath the overhanging tresses, like the eyes of a shy animal within the covert.

"*Somebody* admires it very much," she said, after a pause, in which she found it somewhat difficult to begin. "It is not difficult to guess who it is."

A blush had sprung up in the girl's face, for she had suspected her friend's strategy; but, as if determined to ward off further questions, she said, with a laugh:

"Do you mean Mr. De Courcy?"

"De Courcy is poor and as proud of his birth as you are—you would not have a penny between you," answered her inquisitor. "No, you know perfectly well whom I mean. There are depths of perception included in your simplicity. Do you know that I think you are rather fond of having your own way?"

Vere, who was blushing scarlet, would have found it impossible to answer these insinuations directly. But the way

in which she raised her eyebrows with an air of incredulity seemed to answer for her :

“Do you indeed?”

“Yes, and I am very sorry for your poor uncle, and for the little cousin whom you profess to love. Certainly it is from your uncle that you inherit this strong will, and he on his side—his pride will certainly keep him from speaking out to you. Do you know that this man will have little short of millions? My dear, consider, be a little practical for once. Many men would be glad to accumulate money, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the inclination stops short of fruition. Now in this case the capital has been left to accumulate till——”

The listener could bear it no longer. A frantic desire had grown in her to push away the well-meaning lady, whose grace and amiability had led her so successfully to act the part of mother to many bereft damsels. But Mrs. Austin had so placed herself that the slightest movement on the part of her victim would infallibly have knocked her over.

Vere's breath came quickly, and wild schemes were being formed in her brain as the unconscious tormentor continued :

“Lots of girls would be glad to be in your place. Society used to exact birth and manners, but nowadays it exacts—money.”

The girl sat looking at her stupidly and vacantly. In her readiness to accuse herself, it seemed to her as if she must have done something that was wrong for any one to venture to speak to her of a subject which should only be treated reverently, in that hard and common-place manner. Yet even in her excitement it struck her, with a sense of humour, that Mrs. Austin spoke of Society sympathetically and caressingly, as if she were a delicately-organised female friend.

“Now I admit that in this case the father seems to belong to the true Bohemian class—how he made his way people don't exactly know. But believe me, my dear, people will never inquire. He seems to be a most convenient old gentleman, determined to hide himself from public view. And you,” continued the good woman, emboldened by Vere's silence, “why, it would be like actual wickedness—wickedness to your own uncle, for you to do nothing to relieve him of his anxieties—I might even say his debts. Will you let him die with——”

At the risk of removing the mask which she had carefully worn till now for the sake of the dignity of her family, the outraged girl at last found her voice. It seemed to have changed from a clear soprano to a contralto, strangled in the lower notes, as she answered :

“I do not acknowledge anybody's right to press me to marry any man—not even the right of my own uncle.”

"That is not practical. Excuse me, it is highflown nonsense—there is the man ready to marry you, and there is the money—that is partly why I have spoken to you."

Mrs. Austin had let her arms fall, and Vere, observing the opportunity, rose to her full height.

"He has never given me the chance of which you speak. Certainly we had a few words about it some time ago, but latterly we have had so little conversation."

"That's unfortunate."

"Unfortunate for *me* and my supposed attractions, you mean. I dare say it is."

The girl had an abrupt way of unexpectedly turning the assumption against herself, and putting an end to the conversation, which took Mrs. Austin by surprise.

She had a shrewd nature, as well as a kind one, prompt to recognise a mistake, and she began to deplore her own misconception and to be somewhat indignant with the girl's uncle, when, after a moment or two of inward struggle, her young guest answered, in that altered voice :

"Oh, don't you see that it is a joke?"

CHAPTER III.

A CERTAIN fear underlay Vere's bolder feelings as reminding herself of the words, "Will you do nothing to relieve his anxieties—will you let him die?" she returned to her uncle the next morning. He noticed that she looked cold and white, that her eyes were cast down, and tried to find out whether anything had been accomplished by Mrs. Austin's mediation or by the meeting on the previous evening.

He saw that a change had passed over his niece, and that there was a new sort of despairing tone in the way in which she answered, "You are always harping on that string," as he spoke about his difficulties. The shade of annoyance did not escape him.

"And you are always good," he said, in a tone of encouragement, which he had not been apt to use to her.

"I try to be good, though not always in your way," she said, with a sort of smile, in which a little humour lingered, but with a conscience not altogether clear.

It was hard that, when her life seemed to be commencing in real earnest, it should be so difficult to remind her uncle that she was not only grown up, but had a right to that independence which should belong to every reasonable human being; that she, because she was an unprotected orphan, should have that independence taken away from her; or that, worse still, she should be made the accomplice of a sort of intrigue, was not to be tolerated. The openness of her character made her not only rebel, but determine to free herself from any entanglement, whatever it might cost her. She would not engage in any conflict of words, but there was a look in her face which made Sir Ralph a little afraid.

"If you have anything to tell me," he continued anxiously, "I shall be glad to hear it."

"Thank you; we live in an out-of-the-way corner of the world, and it is the rarest thing for me to have anything new to tell."

The tenacity with which he approached the subject irritated her. She could not get over the feeling that she was to be offered to another man on humiliating terms; the very idea of it filled her with shame and loathing. She walked rapidly when she found herself in the open air, up and down the path in the wilderness, with the tragic air of one who is torn to pieces by conflicting feelings; the greater was merged into the lesser; she almost forgot the small conventionalities of custom and habit. She rather prided herself on not making a show of being sympathetic. It had always seemed to her a little absurd that other women should be so easily moved to laughter or to tears. Owing to the circumstances of her life, and to the responsibilities which had brought premature womanhood upon her, she was, as a rule, self-poised, and with nerves equal to any occasion.

She did not like losing her placidity, and made an effort to control the immoderate emotion which was taking possession of her. She succeeded to a certain extent. But Godfrey could not fail to notice that her face had grown a little hard, and that her eyes were, for the first time, almost wild with some intense feeling which he could not comprehend.

The very weather seemed to be against his chances of success. But a few days before he had passed her near the moor, unknown to her, and had gazed fascinated at one of those pictures which remain photographed on the memory. Vere had been sitting on the trunk of a tree which overhung the water, the birds singing overhead, Dot and some little

friends younger than herself, clustered round her, the little ones laughing, and Vere's own rosy face—free from the look of care which sometimes shadowed it—dimpled with smiles, as she sat on her rustic throne like a queen. The "Little Savage," as Godfrey had sometimes christened Dot, was certainly a good deal spoiled by Sir Ralph. But the child, bounding and rushing about in the buoyancy of health, had seemed to have something in common with the blessed sunshine, with the trees, the flowers, and the fresh perfume of the summer. One could imagine how she felt in every vein of her body the joyful intoxication of her physical life, till she seemed to communicate some of this animal exhilaration, this bounding sense of freedom to all around her. Theoretically, the young man held ideas about the management of children which were much opposed to Sir Ralph's plan of bringing up his only child. But when he had seen Vere surrounded by these merry little ones—all chattering like starlings—he had acknowledged to himself that any sort of pessimism would be inexcusable in the presence of such sunbeams. He had got over his prejudice against the child, and yet he had ventured so far as to suggest the possibility that Vere Rashleigh should come to meet him, and *alone*.

He had dreaded the presence of a precocious child, and had judged from the girl's disposition that he should have more hope for his suit, if he could get her to meet him in the free, open air, and so avoid the stiff conventionalities of calling on her in the house. Something in the atmosphere of that home seemed to be chilling and fatal to all spontaneity, and he had never yet asked for Miss Rashleigh without her uncle.

When the plan had first occurred to him, as he was smoking and half-dreaming over a book, it had seemed to him a good one. But looked at now, in the prosaic light of a dull, commonplace day, he began to fear that the request had been a liberty, as he advanced to meet her, with a face which wore a smile, yet a smile which was by no means confident.

Meadow-sweet was blooming, mixed with the tall spikes of the purple lythrum, on the borders of the stream, and ever afterwards the penetrating sweetness of the subtle odour of those blossoms seemed to be associated with the conversation which followed. The brilliant weather of the previous days had suddenly changed. The morning was damp and uninviting, with a stifling feeling in the air. A few drops of rain fell every now and then, and desultory gleams of watery sunshine occasionally struggled in vain to disperse the gathering clouds. There was not a breath of wind to be felt; not a bird or insect stirred, not a leaf fell.

But Vere, in her state of unusual mental excitement, was

unconscious of the rain which fell upon her face. She had weighed her power against the forces which seemed to be arrayed against her. The circumstances were strong, but she thought herself to be stronger.

After a few moments of awkward constraint, during which they fenced with common-places about the weather, she made a desperate rush at abrupt speech ; for had she not determined to take the initiative, and deprive Godfrey of the advantage of getting out his pawns first?

"What do you want of me? Is it anything about the poor people?" she asked, in a voice which seemed to imply, "I mean to play my part well."

The voice was tremulous, in spite of her resolve, and the eyes—which were bright with that indefinable restlessness which had attracted his attention when he saw her coming to meet him—gave him an annihilating look, at which, under other circumstances, he would have been inclined to smile.

He noticed that her head was thrown back, her lips pressed together, and that her fingers were interlaced in a fashion which she had when she wished to give herself strength to say a difficult thing.

The style of her address was so strange that he did not answer. There was interrogation in his look, a sort of surprise, but he had not the slightest inclination to laugh. The woman's emotion had communicated itself to him. He felt his pulses start ; he was full of intense expectation.

"I suppose you think you have a *right* to invite me here." It was as if she had said: "I wonder the ghosts of the Rashleighs don't rise to disabuse you of the idea. Every inch of this ground has been trodden by the feet of my ancestors."

"Ah, you think that my father robbed you of this piece of ground?" he answered, surprised at her defiant tone. "You are mistaken there. He bought it fairly. There was no robbery in the case."

"There is no occasion for us to argue about *that*. I don't dispute your right," she answered, with no hurry of manner or sign of being affronted at the quick retort which was unusual with him. "We have to deal with matters as they stand. I am a girl, and do not pretend to go into all these business affairs. But it has been explained to me that the property is not what it was—I believe no landed property is—and my uncle, because he doesn't wish to grind down the people, would only have been likely to make a worse paying thing of it than before. You know as well as I do that it is no fault of *his* if he is deeply in debt, and if—if there are what they call mort-

gages on the estates, and that the estates themselves belong more or less to your father."

She felt that she was already becoming almost bookish, although she really knew nothing of law, and would have to seem a good deal more so before the interview was ended. If either of the two could have seen the humorous side of the matter, instead of being so desperately in earnest, they might have understood each other, without more need of studied speech. But Vere's nerves were too agitated for her to be as sensible as usual, and every pulse in the man's body was throbbing now. He fired at the thought that she should ask questions in so direct a way, as if her superior position gave her a right to question, or to express her opinions plainly. He would have liked to answer that, if *he* had anything to do with the matter, he would never evict a tenant, and that he had already incurred his father's anger by vehemently denouncing the behaviour of the present agent in his dealings with the people. He was ready to assure her that, if ever the property came into his own hands, he would see that the factor, or agent of the estate, should be chosen for the justice and liberality of his administration. He would dismiss Newton at once, make the little farm-holdings as comfortable as possible, raise the wages of the labourers, and then he believed that the present agrarian difficulties would be quite easy of adjustment.

But her unexpected mode of address made him feel as if he had nothing to answer. And she continued—as if her ideas had been in some way arranged between the snatches of sleep which had visited her on the preceding night :

"You are aware as well as I that our elders seem to have hit upon a plan, which strikes them as a good one, for sparing my uncle grief. I do not suppose that you have much to do with it, but it would be absurd for me to imagine that you are not aware of it as well as I. Indeed, your invitation to me to present myself before you at your bidding this morning, as if you were King Ahasuerus and I poor Vashti, proves that you are a party to the—conspiracy."

He made a deprecating movement, for his heart had leaped to his mouth, and he would have liked to say : "Ah ! I see—you cannot hide it from me—you do not come to me of your own accord," but he saw that she did not wish him to reply at once, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he restrained himself from interrupting her.

"Wait till I have done," seemed to be conveyed to him by a wave of her hand, and he stood helplessly listening whilst she continued a sort of speech in which her soul seemed to take no part. The sad plaintiveness in her voice had touched him a

little, but the perfect deliberateness of her authoritative manner surprised him more than ever as she continued :

"If conspiracy is too strong a word, I will withdraw it. I mean to be perfectly polite, but I must ask you to forgive me if I am unable to restrain the utterance of some truths which may seem bitter. I am not really bitter—I am disappointed and humiliated."

There was another pause. The colour was still on her lips, though it had flown from her cheeks, and the excess of some feeling which he was unable to understand had given a deeper intensity to her eyes as she added, with more passion than she had shown before :

"*You have* tried to humiliate me—you need not deny it. Do not think that I care for it personally, but it strikes me, as it must strike you, that—that the amount of feeling which you have for me must be terribly slender, when you can claim a woman's hand because others dictate to you."

He interrupted her now. The undemonstrative manner which she had hitherto adopted, as if with the intention of repressing advances, had taken away his power of speech, but the wild anger which seemed to be rising up in her helped him to respond.

"There can be no thought of claiming a thing which should be freely given ; I—I had hoped——"

"Go on," she said, in a way which effectually stopped him, "I am here to listen to whatever you have to say to me that is serious and pressing. I understand that you have learnt your lesson, and I ought to let you repeat it. But, considering that we can reckon up the few hours of our acquaintance, does it not strike you that to count on being accepted after so slight a knowledge of a girl might seem to her little short of an indignity?"

"I counted on nothing."

"No?—then I beg your pardon, it was your father who was so certain. Tell him I will be discreet and not take too great an advantage of his intended kindness," she continued, with that strange scorn in her voice. "Why need we make any pretences about it? I perfectly understand that I stand face to face with the man whose father has power over my unfortunate uncle, and that father wishes me to favour his son. We are neither of us good at acting, and it is useless for me to pretend not to know that—monstrous as it seems—my hand is to be thrown in as part of this property, and that, if I dare to refuse, my relations will suffer. Is not that true?"

She asked the question looking straight into his face, and with that look which told him that she had counted on his being ready to quail at the reproach conveyed in her eyes.

Yet her passion was mastering her now. She had planned the scheme deliberately, intending to pride herself on her skilful reservations, and the coil which she should inextricably twine round her own real feelings. But she could no longer control her natural womanliness. Shame, anger, a sense of outrage, and a vehement desire to revenge herself upon some one showed themselves by turns in her mobile face. Perhaps the shame predominated, for she was painfully conscious that she had lost her usual coolness, and the clearness of her head, and was being hurried in her excitement into saying more than she meant. A suitor who could be drawn into any underhand scheme to win her had to be confronted like an enemy; but, somehow, Godfrey looked little like an enemy as he stood gazing at her—discomfited and surprised.

Her own consciousness of her transformation from her usual calmness and modesty, and of how that transformation must be astonishing the man to whom she spoke, suddenly flooded her cheeks and neck with scarlet, and she hid her burning face for a moment in her hands, as she said—making a vain attempt to resume the forced politeness of a society tone :

"There are some people who are accustomed to treat these things as a jest. I hope you don't think—I mean—I don't want you to think that I am one of those people. I—I am not turning you or anything else into ridicule. I only think that in a sort of thing which has to be stopped, for your sake as well as mine, definitely—it—it is better to be frank."

"I scarcely know what to think," he answered slowly, gazing with a dazed sensation of unreality at the girl who had hitherto seemed to be his dream-incarnation, his ideal found. It was true he had had a sort of feeling that the next minute she would laugh, and say it was all a hoax. "Surely you *do* mean it for a farce," he faltered.

"And you are going to say that the farce is unworthy of any woman?" she answered, pressing her fingers on the dry, aching balls of her eyes, and still setting her will resolutely on the repression of an odd remorse about the sayings of the strange new self which had been performing such an unconventional feat.

"I know it must seem horrible. But was it *I* who invented it? Was it *I* who made it the only way out of a more horribly false position. Ah, I dare say you are like most men, and know little of the feelings of most women. Oh! *my* feelings are of secondary importance, of course,"—the "oh" had popped out before she knew it, and she recognised at once that she was coming down from her stilts and swerving from the programme in which she had determined not to let herself be weak, finding her only alternative in a sort of fierce sincerity. "In most cases,

when a man wishes to woo a girl, he woos her for himself, and not because somebody else suggests it to him. From the ideal side, that is perhaps the best way, but, when money and what they call 'position' come into consideration, there are some people that do not trouble themselves about the ideal."

He put up his hand, as if to ward off a blow, but, though her voice trembled, she continued :

"You would not guess how, rather than having to speak to you like this, I could wish that the earth would open beneath my feet. Scorn of women recoils on men, and I tell you that you have scorned me. You did not mean it, but you treated me as if you knew that I had been brought up to act and think with calculation. When I was a little girl, in short frocks, they used to tell me to be *practical*. They repeated direful tales of the poverty I was to expect ; hinted that I was a burden on my uncle, and added that I was to do the best for myself. Well, I never pretend that I don't appreciate money. I care as much for the things that it brings as the rest of the world. It was understood from the time I was a child that, when the opportunity came, I was to do my duty. The duty might have taken the form of some millionaire with white hair and wrinkled cheeks, and I should still have been expected to perjure myself 'for life, for death,' with people smiling on, and never dreaming of reproving me. I think it less bold to speak a few plain truths now, to tell you that I cannot call bitter sweet and sweet bitter, that in my secret heart I call things by their right names ; and bargains of this sort are horrible to me. But, after all, if I am to sell myself, I might do worse. Some poor girls who set a good value on their looks—whilst I set none on mine—might very possibly envy me my bargain."

There was a break in her voice, in spite of her high courage and contemptuous allusions to herself.

"You are trying to be satirical, but I do not believe you—you are wronging yourself."

His wondering eyes seem to pierce her with a fresh sting, and, conquering her indications of weakness, she continued :

"No ; I make no pretence to be what I am not. There is apparently no room in my life for romance. But I hate the cold, shallow theories which some people are pleased to expound about marriage. It is profaning the name of love to talk about it in such a manner. If you want to make your own life bearable, you will say that it was not my fault, but *you* did not like me. Is it because I have neither father nor mother that I have been placed in such a cruel dilemma ? Do you know that my aunt on her death-bed, made me promise to do my utmost for the little one whom she left behind her ? I have never regretted my promise, and I am trying to keep it now. I

would lay down my life for that little Dorothy, and even for my uncle. It must not be said that *I* refused you, and deprived them of your money. But what I ask is perfectly simple. I throw myself on your generosity. I have adopted the only means of dealing with you in earnest. If I say that I was ready enough to accept you, and you were disenchanted with me, and yet promised to do something for my little cousin, you will be helping me amazingly. I see you are surprised," she added, pressing both her hands on her now burning cheeks, "but that is because you know me so little. Could I refuse to help my uncle in his present strait? But I owe something to my womanhood. I give my relations their due, neither more nor less. It would be hard on my uncle to say that I act in this way by compulsion. I suppose it is necessity—but the necessity is no more likely to be agreeable to you than to me."

He bent his head, and she continued, rapidly :

"If I were a man, I might persuade myself I was performing a chivalrous act in conferring, rather than receiving, a favour. My happiness may be safer in your keeping than in my own—that seems to be an idea to which other people have made up their minds. But—but both of us know how many wretched marriages there are in the world, and that a happy one is scarcely likely to be made in this way. I will not believe that you have anything to do with such a bargain ; you could never be so petty, so ungenerous."

He had no time to think how shortsighted were the people who had placed a high-spirited girl in such a position, but as he looked at her flashing eyes, feeling as if he were unable to move his tongue, or even to unclench his teeth, he was too confused to be aware that his continued silence was a tacit admission of her impeachment.

The silence irritated and perhaps disappointed her. It maddened her to recollect that, when she had not intended to be surprised into any sort of confidence, her weakness had, after all, mastered her, and that she might even have seemed to be making a parade of her opinions for nothing. She cared less of what he thought of her, and made less attempt to check the headlong impulse which was so unusual with her, but which was still hurrying her into this passionate speech.

"Ah ! perhaps you are weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the match. You are learned, you have had a University training," she continued, in the same barbed words which he had found so difficult to answer—"pity you cannot turn it into a mathematical problem. You see, it has nothing to do with *feelings*—you must view it in the abstract. There are lots of people like that, they say, in the world, closely bound together, without——"

Her voice broke down at last, for there was something in his face which reminded her that she might lose her self-respect in talking thus wildly. Already the sickening feeling that this wild talk would be a haunting, tantalising recollection in after years was beginning to be a sharp pain from which it was impossible to escape.

In five minutes it would all be over, and although she knew that the hard-fought victory would be won, and had felt that she did not lose an inch of the ground, the reaction had already come, and she felt as if she could be almost thankful if he were to assert himself, and show some spirit on his side.

He roused himself at last from his monotonous silence, and from that tendency to stammering slowness in expressing himself which had always been his bane when he had been indignant with other men for illiberal condemnation of opinions which did not happen to tally with their own.

Charles Lamb himself could not have stuttered more than Godfrey did as he answered, with an effort :

"I—s-s-suppose you k-know there is a sort of r-r-risk in this. If—I—I were to t-take you at your w-word?"

"You could not do it. You would be *miserable*," she answered quickly, for there was that in his face which prevented her from being the least alarmed, and which made her look back upon her own speeches, and wish she had had the subtlety to treat the whole thing with a lighter touch. "I know you think in your heart that a marriage would be *terrible* founded on this sickening consideration for money advantages. I could wish for your own sake you had not the money—you, who used to talk so generously and benevolently, and for whose future one might have prophesied *such* great things! Oh!—" looking him again in the face, and thankful for the opportunity of putting herself a little on one side—"I thought, when I made up my mind to speak to you the other day, that I might reckon on your sympathy, your active help, that what the poor people round us were suffering would have been of more importance to you than any personal advantage. But I—I have diligently inquired. I have tried to do you justice, and I find that the little money you have doled out to these poor dependants of ours is a mere drop in the bucket, and that no benevolent plans for helping them to help themselves, such as you talked of at Oxford, are to be carried out."

He made a deprecating movement with his hand, but she continued:

"Ah! yes, I understand; you are to be helpless in all this. Crying evils are to go unremedied, because you are a sleeping partner, or no partner at all, in these injustices, and meanwhile

the profits are to come to you, and"—lowering her voice and covering her face again—"to—*me*."

He bowed his head; he could speak now without stammering, for he was more angry than he had been at all.

"I will not stoop to justify myself," he said, coldly, "or I might have troubled you to hear my side of the matter. You talk of these things as if they were new to me, and, after all, it strikes me as somewhat grotesque to remember that no man at Oxford railed more against 'Midas-eared Mammon,' or talked of the enfranchisement of the masses from the reign of squalor and misery, than I did; but—it has pleased you to ignore my side of the question."

"It is precisely because I do not ignore it—that I think action is better than talk, and that when you came home I thought it would be all so different," she began to explain, a little despairingly.

But it seemed as if he did not hear her; it was as if the ringing in his ears and the beating of his heart had made him a little deaf.

"There is only one comfort in all this," he said, a little slowly, "that you have opened my eyes to another mistake. You have done your best to make me go from here—heart-whole."

He raised his hat and was leaving her.

She had accomplished her purpose. The part had been played well; the game was won. And yet what inconsistent change had taken place in her heart, that she was beginning to think of the whole episode as an unhappy fatality? Why should there be tears of wounded feeling in her eyes, and why should she suddenly wish to spoil all the effectiveness of what she had already said, by what seemed to her might be an explanation of her strange behaviour, but which after all could only amount to hysterical reiteration.

"You are an enigma to me—as great an enigma as your father," she said, in a voice which sounded as if a little more would make her cry. "But I should like you thoroughly to understand *me*. I admit that I thought well of you from what I heard of you before you came, and I have been perhaps wrong to put a bad construction on what is a puzzle to me; but that you should have talked to *others* as if you were ready to stretch out a hand for help to your fellow-men, and now—now when you have an opportunity—show no resolute desire to do your best—it is—odd—you must admit. And," with a sort of thrill of pain shaking her, "that you should insult me in this way is more of a strange disappointment. I try not to mind, for as a woman I represent women—and," with her

hands fidgetting with the fastenings of her cloak in a wandering, uncertain way, "and—it *may* have been thoughtlessness on your part—or ignorance of how we women may feel. If so, I am sorry for being unguarded in my language; but as a man of—of—honour, you must see that the part you have been playing here is a part likely to pain any woman. The brigand who demands a man's life or his purse at least allows him the liberty of choice. And you—what liberty was left for me or for yourself in a bargain like this? *You* were to be drawn into this calculating scheme, to be sacrificed whether you liked it or not?"

Agitated as he was, he tried to make a sign of smiling dissent.

But the growing anguish in her voice seemed to deepen the gulf between them, as she continued:

"Men mistake sometimes—they pay too much for a horse or a dog. How much more likely are they to be mistaken in a woman. I am trying to think what could have led you to entertain such ideas about me. If I were good-looking it might be different—my hair might be worth so much and my smile so much. It is not so long since they used to put quadroons up for auction in India. The sale could have nothing to do with their hearts, that could be no part of the bargain. Oh, forgive me! I am proud of my birth, proud of the blood which flows in my veins; but if I had had a negro mother I would have killed myself rather than be turned into merchandise."

She no longer made an effort to hide the gathering tears, as she stretched out her hands and said:

"I believed in your kind words, your chivalrous conduct towards women, your sympathy for our troubles, your readiness to help us. I liked to believe in it; but now it seems it was all—a—a mistake. I ought to have made myself more agreeable to you. I know if I had done my duty I should have done so, instead of staking all my hopes on the certainty of your refusal. If you could have had the title, for instance, there might have been something for you to gain. But oh, I have heard so much about marriages in which there was no congeniality of thoughts and tastes. Think of two people living under the same roof, unable to accommodate themselves to each other, and too often with private disagreements. Can you imagine any greater misery? And what blessing could there be upon our marriage if we were to commence in a way like this? I did not mean to make you angry. I was thinking of you as well as myself; and I was sure you would see as plainly as I do that it could not be."

He knew not which had been the hardest to bear, the impetuous rush of words which had been so little like her

usual calmness, and which had seemed to beat upon him like a storm of shot and shell, or the low voice which was diffident and trembling, but just as determined. During the long compulsory silence he had more than once told himself that this was one of those deep-natured women who are seldom openly stirred by strong emotion and who rarely assert themselves, but who, when they do, display a fixity of purpose and a strength of will sufficient to sweep away any amount of gainsaying.

"I meant to have shown better tact, but I have failed most dreadfully. I should make a very bad diplomatist," she continued, conquering her emotion, and looking at him without flinching.

Had he been less confused he would have taken advantage of the undefinable something in her manner, which showed that she was anxious to prolong the interview. He might have lost his opportunity. He thought so long afterwards, when he remembered how, instead of answering her at once, he stood staring at her dumbly, feeling as if the seal were still set on his lips, and as if he had not yet recovered his senses sufficiently to answer her. Could he expect to understand all at once the innermost sanctuary of a woman's heart?

"I do not blame you," he said, after a pause, during which she noticed that he was powerfully moved, "you have scarcely given me time to realise the situation. But I think, if you allow me to say so, that you are not free from the invincible pride for which perhaps you are not responsible. It is one of the vices of your rank. Had you not been so hard on me, I might have cleared myself. But your words struck me. A thunderbolt could not have surprised me more. If you allow me to speak now I swear to you that, if I was not absolutely ignorant of all that you mention, I was at least concerned in no conspiracy."

He could say no more. For a man of refined instincts to be reminded by a woman that he had allowed himself to tamper with her finer feelings, and to be drawn into an arrangement of this sort, was unbearable. He ought to have been able to falter and equivocate. He should have been dignified and subtle, ready to suggest excuses for himself, but he had quailed, as if he were the weaker of the two in the emergency, and *now*! he could only bear the burden of his indecision and embarrassment.

A pang of humiliation, a sense of physical pain of which he was ashamed as of a weakness, could not be entirely hidden. For the hand which he stretched out to her visibly shook.

"Good-bye," he said, "you were afraid of a *mésalliance*, you need be afraid no longer. Your pride would not allow you to

brook the idea of owing anything to a husband of plebeian blood. And--and you are too frank by nature to keep up a permanent reticence about anything."

"No, no, you are mistaken," she cried, in 'horror at the idea.

But it was too late for him to listen to her. He tried to think of her in much the same way in which he would have thought of a far-off star predestined to an orbit in which he could not move. He had hesitated about asking :

"Do you think I could be of any assistance to you as a sort of elder brother? I am very much at your service. Sons cannot always dictate to fathers, but I flatter myself I have a fair amount of influence with mine."

But on second thoughts he dismissed the idea of making any further advance as absurd. And she too was conscious of that strange revulsion of feeling which, when he had gone, made her strain her eyes to look after him. There were tears still in her eyes, which she was forced to brush away, as they blinded her sight. Her sense of injury ought to have been soothed, but his last words had distressed her singularly.

"It is all over now. I have set up a barrier between us which nothing can remove. Perhaps it was madness," she said to herself. "But we never could have been happy *in that way*. It was best to end it so ; but oh--if he should think me forward and unmaidenly !"

CHAPTER IV.

As Godfrey left the shrubbery and returned to his house, he felt exasperated with what he called his own weakness. He acknowledged that he had been hard hit ; he who had never yet been seriously crossed in anything. It was as if his nerves still thrilled with the effort of longing to speak and defend himself, and of being unable to tell out the longing concealed in his heart. He knew that he had answered stupidly, and felt as if he must have looked like a dumb and ridiculous dupe. She had made a direct appeal to his manliness and sense of

right, and his tongue had been tied, owing to the double embarrassment of feeling that there was a modicum of truth in the charges which she brought against him, and the impossibility of explaining how little he was to blame. He was worsted, discomfited, routed. The whole scene had been incongruous, and he felt shaken by it—so shaken that he had to steady his steps. His arteries throbbed, his temples were burning, and he felt as if he would like to rest his aching head on the wet grass.

It would have been possible, if he had wished to attempt self-exculpation. It would have been easy even now to moralise flippantly about the impulsiveness and injustice of women. But as his thoughts travelled quickly over the history of the past, and as he tried to consider the matter in a perfectly impartial spirit, it was more natural to him to see his own shortcomings with a cruel distinctness. For his was one of those dispositions which are ever painfully alive to their own deficiencies. And the girl's words still stung him, as if she had poison under her lips. For a moment he tried to assume his father's cynicism, and to congratulate himself on his escape from a woman who was as formidable as this. But the remembrance of the blue eyes, with tears hanging on their lashes, and the quivering lips, made this impossible. Yet it had been "hard lines," for him, "cruelly hard lines," he repeated to himself. How could he have allowed himself to be placed in a position in which such a woman could turn on him? He had been conscious of standing before her like a simpleton, with no word to say for himself. But, if the whole thing were to come over again, he would be just as dumb with wounded pride, and with nothing to sweeten the bitterness of his mortification. For all the instincts with which he honoured womanhood had arrayed themselves on Vere's side, when she had stripped his father's motives bare, and made him acknowledge himself a culprit.

"How direct and good she is," he said to himself, "in spite of her anger—there was something noble even in that anger. And I—I to place her in such a vexatious, disagreeable situation! A sorry and contemptible figure I must have cut," he added, with a laugh at his own expense, "as I stood before her, morally detected, mentally stunned, and could only beat a most cowardly retreat."

All emotion is, as George Eliot says, "obstinately irrational," and it would have been useless to argue with him in his present humour, or to make him see, as Vere was beginning to see painfully already, that excessive feeling, like ambition, may at times, "o'erleap itself, and fall on t'other side." In real life it often happens there is an irresistibly comic element, never

intended by the actors, in tragedy itself; and the girl, who had a keen sense of humour, was already taking herself to task for her absurdity.

"It would not have happened, but for this wretched money. I wish I were out of it," he said again to himself. It had long been an annoyance to him that he had never been able to get a clear account from his father as to how this money had been made. The consequences of its possession, when there was a mystery connected with it, had long disturbed his slumbers and hindered his peace. He determined that it should be so no longer.

"Are ye so absent that ye can't see straight before ye?" asked Reuben, who met him as he went towards the house, finding it somewhat difficult to steady his steps.

The father had almost uttered one of his guttural exclamations, which were apt to sound like a stifled curse, as he saw his son's excited face. There was no embarrassment or hang-dog look in it, but something which he found it difficult to understand.

"What has happened to my dreamer? You come like a thunderstorm. We ought to strike up, 'See the Conquering Hero comes.'"

"What conqueror?" asked Godfrey, feeling as if hammers were still beating on his brain, and struggling in vain to assume an indifferent manner. "Don't you think that about the 'conquering hero' is a trifle hackneyed?"

He was ashamed of his rudeness directly he had uttered the words. But Reuben was not thin-skinned. He contented himself with vague and facetious allusions by which he tried to hide his evident anxiety.

The tone of his voice was a trifle hoarse as he said:

"Pluck up heart, my boy, you seem to be cast down. Faint heart never won fair lady."

"You may spare yourself the trouble of alluding to the subject," murmured Godfrey, in a low voice, "I only regret taking advantage of Miss Rashleigh's painful position. I was unskilful in my wooing. I do not deplore it."

The veins on Reuben's forehead stood out in strange relief—the colour on his cheeks became too deep and too blue.

"Do me the honour to repeat that."

There was an ominous pause. The young man resented the bullying tone. The blood leaped to his usually pale face, and for a few moments he held in check a fiercer heat than he had ever felt before in his life. Then the tussle was over. He got his temper sufficiently under his command to say again, in a low voice:

"I only regret taking advantage of Miss Rashleigh's defence-

less position. I have completely failed, and the failure is not to be deplored."

The pause had given Reuben time to see that he had made a mistake, and he said in a jaunty tone :

"Why, you are precious easy discouraged, seems to me. You don't expect a gal to jump down your throat without the asking?"

"No, we have spoken together on the subject."

"And the minx refused you," cried Reuben, dashing his hand with fury on the table.

"She had too much good taste to refuse point-blank."

"What did she say?"

"That she was the victim of a conspiracy, and if she consented to marry me under such circumstances, it would not be for my own sake, but only on account of her relations, and the money."

"Well, that's one for her—she scored a point there. She has sense enough to see that money is the great force which turns this world's clappers."

"Oblige me by not bringing her name any more into the conversation," answered Godfrey.

But the man's passion would have its way.

"D—ce take the women," he muttered, beneath his breath. "A cantankerous, ill-made, thin-skinned, mawkish, mulish sex. One can only tolerate their existence because the world would stand still without 'em." Godfrey drew himself up to his full height. But, seeing the expression in his son's face, the elder man tried to laugh good-humouredly. "I tell ye that beggars can't be choosers. She ought to be thankful enough to marry ye."

Godfrey controlled himself again. He knew that his father was not of his world, nor could comprehend his chivalrous respect for womanhood. Yet his voice vibrated strangely, and jarred on his father as he tried to explain.

"If I could have one of those dazzling birds of paradise which I used to admire when I was a child," he answered, still speaking deliberately, as if he had learnt from Vere her tone of assumed calmness, "to perch on my shoulder or nestle in my hand, I might thank you for the present. But do you think I should care to deprive it of its liberty, to see it sitting mopingly on its perch as quietly as if it were stuffed and stuck up in a glass case, or wild, and battering its poor wings against the bars of its cage? Let it come to me of its free will, or not at all."

"That may be all very well for *you*. A chap given to sentiment, with eyes which look for all the world as if he's a-seeing visions when he had ought to be wide awake," retorted Reuben,

with his words readier than usual, but relapsing into the vernacular in his violent irritation, and speaking half as if to himself. "A thing that might have been brought to a splendid end, frustrated, spoilt, because two children pout. Because," he continued, as if he were quoting, "the boy dislikes 'the favour of the girl,' and loves some doll instead—and the girl—— Heaven grant me patience!"

"I do *not* dislike the lady in question. Miss Rashleigh is irreproachable, and I cannot have her spoken of in that light way. She was naturally angry with me for proposing a mysterious *rendezvous*; she divined the meaning of it, and treated me as I deserved."

"You were a namby-pamby fool."

"I agree with you—I was a fool to be drawn into such a project. I think that Miss Rashleigh reasoned soundly—more soundly than the persons who drove her to speak out."

"Hold your tongue, simpleton!" shouted Reuben, fairly beside himself with rage.

"You must let me have my say. I repeat she is right. I could not give her the reparation she required. I could not tell her the accusations were untrue. She might have loved me, had not her mind been prejudiced against me by this absurd project. But, as it is, you have opened an abyss between us."

"Truly, you must have milk in your veins instead o' blood," said the older man, with another scornful glance, "and she as proud as Lucifer!"

"Who can wonder that she is proud? She comes of a race in which pride is considered to be a virtue. She is possessed of that sort of innocence and candour one generally associates with superhuman beings; but she is courageous besides. I do not think the less of her for her remarkable firmness of character. She did not address to me one word which was too bitter, considering the circumstances which were likely to turn her heart against me."

A new sort of fear occurred to the father, especially when Godfrey added:

"Let me alone; it is not myself that I care about—it is because a woman has suffered, and that woman, if you care to hear it, I love dearly as my own life. Under other circumstances, we might have been happy together, and now I could only leave her with a sensation of shame."

"Don't expect me to care about the ins-and-outs of your love affairs," said Reuben, beginning to be a little more alarmed. "There's more fish in the sea yet. We'll show her that there are others as well worth the having. It's right that you should marry, and that little girl Dorothy will grow up prettier by half than her cousin. And I can answer for *her*

accepting ye. I'll have no more half-measures about this here estate."

Reuben's grammar was becoming wild, but his son's face remained impenetrable.

"You try my sense of duty too far," he muttered, between his teeth.

His father did not hear him. He continued :

"This'll tame the shrew. Though, when I think on't, if you'd urged her—spoke to her more lover-like——"

"I told you I would not allow her name to be brought into the conversation."

The low, concentrated voice was not to be set at naught, and Reuben said, more gently :

"But the other maid?"

"The idea is monstrous. Before I consented, on this last occasion, to make love to any lady according to your primitive notions, I ought to have been pretty sure that her wishes lay in the same direction. This infatuated pursuit of her was, to say the least of it, undesirable. But I absolutely repudiate any idea of repeating the mistake. I will have nothing to do with such a lunatic bargain. Good God—does it need saying?—I would rather eat the dust off my shoes!"

And Reuben, looking at him, saw that the lad's face was as white as the face of a corpse.

The strange, self-reliant man who had borne every vicissitude of hunger, fatigue, endurance, and self-denial for thirty-three years—always with a view to the accomplishment of a wild purpose—was almost ready to hate himself at that moment. In his son's apparent weakness lay his strength against him.

He approached Godfrey with a curious tenderness, placing his arm so as to support him. But the lad motioned him away with a movement almost like disgust.

"No, I can walk quite well," he said, turning instinctively in his agitation towards the shadier plantation. "You talked to me once before," he muttered, as soon as he could command his voice, "about bringing Sir Ralph on his 'marrowbones' before you. Why do you bear these Rashleighs such a grudge?"

Then for the first time he heard his father's tale.

"A grudge! If to bear a grudge was to wish as he had wished for years to see another man humiliated and stamped on as he had been stamped himself with the marks of degradation!"

Reuben laughed aloud. He could not have told why he laughed, unless it was at the incredible irony of Fate. To have spoilt his own life in the mad fury of his desire for vengeance, and every time to be foiled—so as to feel sick and ashamed of

his deeply-nursed revenge—to be opposed by his own son on the second occasion when the time for his reckoning seemed to have come, and when he was near the achievement of a purpose which he had cherished for so many weary years! It made him laugh like a madman. It was something to be able to pride himself on the steady working-out of his own will, and to witness the fulfilment of a curse which had turned the human kindness in his heart to gall. But somehow the Fates had been against him, and the curse was scarcely so pleasant in its fulfilment as he had expected.

It is the unexpected (as Disraeli said) which always happens. And once before at the very moment when Reuben was holding the trump card—after a series of almost unprecedented successes, following years of treadmill work—it had been dashed out of his hand. Was it accident, or was it some spiritual agency outside his fell purpose, which had so ordered it that on the very day when—fearful of revealing himself for an instant to his simple countrymen—Reuben was driving to take possession of the property which he had purchased, the man whom he had intended to see writhe under his threats was struck by the hand of death which disarmed his human arm? There had been a feeling akin to murder in the heart of the self-made man who had returned triumphant. He had intended his enemy to sue to him for mercy, and to acknowledge the bitterness of a thrust which he could entrust to no deputy. He had reminded himself, when Sir George was dead, that into his deeply-laid plan of revenge there had entered no question of personal violence. He had simply intended to poison the baronet's life for him, just as his own life had been early poisoned by the injustice to which he had imagined Sir George had subjected him. He had meant to humiliate him through bitter experiences of poverty; he had intended to grind down by slow degrees that tormentor of his boyhood, the remembrance of whom had been a thorn in his side all his life—a shadow in his path. But he was just too late.

He tried to explain something of this to his son.

"I had not forgotten. It was impossible for me to forget. I bear the marks of his cruelty still."

He repeated this almost mechanically; he had repeated it so often before. But somehow the old argument did not avail when Sir George was dead. The difficulty which had made it impossible for Reuben to accept a religion which said to him "forgive," seemed somewhat to have melted away. He began to perceive that the revenge which he had nursed was out of all proportion to the offence supposed to have been committed. He had prided himself on not being superstitious, but he certainly was uncomfortable when old Sir George's funeral had

filed past his house, for it seemed as if his desire for vengeance had been anticipated in rather a ghastly way.

Under any circumstances, it is a curious experience to come back to a place which you have photographed in your memory for years, to find the place itself and the whole train of associations connected with it—utterly changed. If the memory of it has been like an old tune breaking unpleasantly on your present associations, and if the mood in which you left the spot has been an evil one haunting you, and preoccupying you to the detriment of better things, the best way to destroy the disagreeable illusion is to go back, and see it with the matter-of-fact, work-a-day eyes which may help you to sweep away the unhealthy fabric of the dream at once.

But if at the same time there has been one of those strange coincidences which so constantly occur in life—a coincidence difficult to dismiss from the mind, as one of those mere accidents which are supposed to have nothing to do with an overruling Providence—a coincidence, moreover, which arrests you in a purpose, stands in your path in an obstinate fashion, like Balaam's ass—you will be apt to feel at the same time a little staggered and ashamed.

I suppose each of us might imagine a mental agony which we might define, according to our several temperaments, as the greatest imaginable unhappiness in life. But could anything surpass the pang of a martyr chained to a stake, and realising just as the flames were lit that the purpose for which he was to suffer was, after all, a mistaken one? It was with a feeling akin to this that Reuben, who had spent years of painful deprivation in order that an old man might feel the anguish of mental blows as poignantly as he himself had felt the physical blows—the marks of which he bore yet—had acknowledged that the triumph had been taken from him, and that there was little of the expected aroma of vengeance in reflecting that Sir George's sins might be visited on his children.

After all, the reckoning had to be with Sir Ralph, and the sight of Sir Ralph's niece had suggested a project as ambitious, but more benevolent, to Reuben's busy brain. Sir Ralph was not the man who had wronged him; the son could not be responsible for the father's mistakes. And Reuben, who had one tender place in his heart, shrank from aiming blows that might threaten other interests which were dear to him. He told himself that he was human, and that there might be, after all, some truth in the teaching of the parsons. In his own case, he had felt as if he could never respond again to human weaknesses, except in the matter of his only son. All women, from his point of view, were but toys. He had never thought of his own wife as different from the rest of them. But when Godfrey had been

born—a new kind of child, with a love for flowery lanes and green fields—a child of a romantic habit of mind, who passed his time in dreams and imaginative reveries—he regarded him with tenderness, mixed with a modicum of contempt.

The idea of righting himself from injury was as strong as ever, but it had assumed another form. If he had had no other interest, no concern in the world but himself, it might still have taken the form of hatred. It would have been easy then, but *now* he could no longer persuade himself that all the love in his nature had turned to gall. His triumph might be used to humiliate Sir Ralph, and at the same time to spare him to a certain extent by raising Godfrey. Stubborn and unforgiving as Reuben was at heart, he was still a little tickled by the humorous idea that old Sir George's ghost—supposing it to be conscious of that which was taking place on this earth of ours—would be maddened at the thought that his granddaughter had been forced to marry the son of that thief whom he had caused to be flogged and imprisoned.

Reuben had wished the old baronet to “die a dog's death,” and his conscience was sometimes troubled by the remembrance of this wish. But there would be a sort of poetic justice in the other finale. He had several times rehearsed the scene in which he intended to disclose his origin to Sir Ralph, as soon as the marriage had irrevocably taken place. He would like to see the expression on the proud man's face when he heard that his niece had married the son of a jail-bird. But Godfrey's fastidious scruples had ruined the well-laid plan.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was silence when Reuben finished his tale, which had been told by degrees in abrupt, jerky sentences, in the plain, incisive English of which the man had a fair command, though he did not always speak it with grammatical correctness. Both men, by common consent, had seated themselves on a rustic bench, and the elder one did not look at his son when he had finished, but settled himself again on the bench from which he

had risen in the excitement of the narrative, dropping his arms by his side, while that part of his face which was not covered by the beard assumed again the hard rigidity which for a time had relaxed.

He was waiting his son's answer with an intensity of expectation. If he did not expect applause, he had counted on his sympathy. But the heart-drawn sigh of the younger man was certainly not encouraging. Godfrey, indeed, was stunned, and trying to think. He had heard the tragic tale with his outward ears, but his inward senses had refused to take it in. Waves seemed to be passing over his mind in which his intelligence was submerged. The bitterness of his father's speech had been as painful for him to listen to, as his excitement had been painful to witness.

Reuben's eyes had been wild and troubled as he told the story, and his hands had trembled like those of a drunken man. It was a strange, unnatural story for a man of Godfrey's refined instincts and cultivated tastes to hear. Yet Reuben was his father still; and, if he had nursed his revenge beyond the ordinary course of nature, somehow he had conquered it at last. His success in life had probably been owing to it. In Reuben's case, the generalisation of "*La Bruyère*" with regard to love had only been exemplified in another way. Hatred and vengeance had led to ambition, but Godfrey—as soon as his thoughts became clearer—had a hope that in his father's case ambition would never be likely to return again to the meaner passion which had inspired it. Reuben had tried to keep the passion up; but more than thirty years was too long a time, and for want of fuel it had died.

"Thank you for telling me. You were treated abominably. But the time which has passed should wipe out the score," said the younger man, after a painful pause.

"And yet you sit there and refuse to help me!"

"I haven't it in my power," answered the other man, slowly. "If I had, would you wish me to take part in a wrong? Sir Ralph's niece had nothing to do with it—nor Sir Ralph himself. Don't think me unkind, but I confess, if I had heard all this before, it would have made it more difficult than ever for me to address Miss Rashleigh."

"As how?"

Godfrey could not answer, but muttered something about its being more difficult than ever, in case of his parentage becoming known. He himself would think none the less of his parentage, and he was careful, even in trying to explain himself, to hide how great a shock it had been to him to hear of his father's irregular birth.

"It is hard to make you understand," he said, a little

feverishly. "It is well for you to have told me all this story—there ought to be nothing hidden between us; but it might—it might be an impediment to——"

"You tell me this to my face!"

"Why not? I can understand how the cruelty practised on you in your childhood may have haunted you in the way which you describe. It is horrible to think of your passing through the years, unloved and misunderstood, with a nightmare like this driving you almost to madness. But the thing is past. Would you have me bind a curse like this up with my life? Should a marriage have anything to do with revenge?"

He could hear his father's hard breathing in the second pause which ensued. The two characters were so utterly different that it was difficult for Godfrey to understand how any injury could so have eaten into a naturally loving heart as to make Reuben go on his unforgiving way week after week, month after month, year after year. In this world of death, where there are so many sorrows to be healed—so many wounds to be bound up, so much suffering to be hidden—it seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility that a man could deliberately have gone on creating a worse horror—a hell for himself shut out from the sweet light of heaven. Self-mutilation of this kind, lopping away all the joyousness and real happiness of life—condemning oneself to the outer darkness while the wedding-feast was going on and the door not shut, was incomprehensible from any point of view in which the younger man could look at it.

He was sorry, but he would keep his own soul unspotted. He had his own honour to think of; he needed a quiet brain—to be still and think.

Then Reuben's voice broke forth again in angry protest, and, as he looked contemptuously at his son, he cried:

"I compliment ye on your womanish weakness, yer mean-spirited cowardice; but unfortunately I can't take yer advice. The family has made me suffer, and it's right as the family should suffer in its turn. I don't credit Sir Ralph with fine feelings, but I compliment you on yours."

"Thank you," murmured his son, suddenly chilled.

"The moment has struck when I shall be able to pay the family in good coin for the turn it did me. No audacity on the part of a gal shall stop me, and I think I may add, no audacity on the part of my own boy."

"I think it is your duty to do all you can to repair the mischief from which you suffered—no such cruelties are practised in our time—but not to make the innocent suffer."

"*My duty!* I tell you what, young man," answered Reuben, buttoning his coat, while he tried in vain to keep his blood cool,

"you altogether forget yerself in the way you allow yerself to speak to me. They may well say that nowadays children dictate to parents, and parents obey children. But this is a question of right and justice. I've bought the property, I can do what I like wi' it."

"It is not a question of justice, but of pure humanity. You bring this accusation against the grandfather, and it rebounds upon the granddaughter—a helpless girl of twenty, whose dignity is injured."

"Ah—h!" answered Reuben, with the guttural sound in his throat which jarred disagreeably on Godfrey's nerves, "there's the explanation of all this palaver; you think a deal more of this fine lady than you do of me."

"If you mean that I love her, you are right; and yet I don't wish, under present circumstances, to marry her. You can't strike her without striking me."

Reuben smiled ironically.

"My boy, you don't know me. If I've once said as a thing can be done, no tall talk o' this sort can shake me."

"If a blow is to be dealt, it should be at once," he said to himself. "Short and sharp, that's my way."

Godfrey did not answer, though he rose to go. He wished he did not know a secret which he must not be so rash as to tell, but which haunted him as if the very air could tell it.

CHAPTER VI.

GODFREY, who slept but little that night, was up as soon as the day began to dawn. It was almost instinctively that he bent his steps to the old burial-ground at Tarringmoor which his father had described. It had been too late to put a headstone over the undistinguishable grave of the woman who had done her best to influence the waif for good. But Godfrey noticed that the weeds which grew rankly in other parts of the graveyard had been cleared in the corner where all that was earthly of Mary Burton had been laid, and that a few flowers had been planted.

"There is more than one weak spot in his heart after all. It explains a great deal," reflected the young man a little tenderly

as he put his hand within the rails and plucked a moon-daisy, "and yet it will be better for us to part."

His hot, human protest, his determination to assert his will in this crisis, seemed somehow to be calmed by the recollection of the quiet sleepers for whom the love and hate, passion and madness of this life had passed away. They had been paupers, knowing not so much of the joy as of the sorrow of this world. Their hearts must have throbbed as his did once. Human tragedies must have been enacted by some of them. And yet—one could not think of them now in connection with pitiful heartburnings and raging passions. He put the moon-daisy in his pocket-book, and returned—saying nothing of his long walk—to the breakfast-table.

He had made up his mind, and had said over and over to himself, in that quiet walk over the moor.

"Stay *here*!—to be ground down to a moral level which I have always scorned! To have the life worried out of me, and to learn at last to despise myself—it is not to be thought of."

All his wishes, which had long been curbed, were now turning towards a freer life—where the race was to the swift, and the battle to the strong. He did not over-estimate his own capacities, and yet he was conscious of a longing to measure himself with others, who might be better men than he. Anything rather than remain in this dull mediocrity. His last conversation with his father had been like the scattering of mists, revealing "rocks ahead," which he had hitherto scarcely suspected.

The very thought of the money he was to inherit was a torture to him. He had been right when he had told Vere that he had always despised it. The comforts with which he had been surrounded from his earliest boyhood came as naturally to him as the air he breathed, and it was difficult for him to form the slightest idea of what it might be for him to miss them. His father's treatment of the tenants had done much to arouse him, and Vere's allusion to the way in which action in his own case seemed to be divorced from duty had determined him more than ever to be no longer like a sleep-walker among drowsy men. It was no time for ease and comfort.

In his somewhat morbid state of self-reproach he thought that he could guess how Reuben had made his money, from the knowledge of how it was left to gather now like a cruel avalanche sweeping away everything helpless before it. He could not redeem the past by any self-sacrifice, but he was responsible for the present. The evils of which he was conscious around him seemed to him no longer for slow cure, but for rapid and slashing amputation of everything that offended.

His last conversation about the poor people had been utterly useless. He could not improve the cottages or interfere with the tenants without leave from his father. Further discussion on the subject had long ago threatened to become violent. Reuben had not advanced one step to meet his son in any of his benevolent projects. Godfrey was checkmated. He had heard that, since his father had bought up nearly all the territory originally belonging to the Rashleigh family, the agent whom he employed had driven out many a peasant to starve or to betake himself and his wife and children to the Tarringmoor workhouse. None of the accusations hinted at by Vere had been unfounded.

And so, at the first allusion to money—Reuben's favourite subject—the young man spoke out.

"I wish it did not belong to you, or that it was not to come to me," was his passionate cry. "It seems to me that this constant desire for money, *money, money*, must dwindle and wither all that is best in us. I honour you for your work, I honour you for your self-denial, but it may be better for me to labour as you did before me. Not for hoarding, not for saving, not for leaving a fortune behind me when I die—for it seems to me that directly we begin to care about money for its own sake we are digging a ditch, or widening the breach which already exists between us and all that is best. The money becomes like a heavy weight keeping one down to the slums of life. After all, what can it purchase but the poorest of food for the wants of"—he was going to say, "our higher natures?" but he stopped short.

A humorist would have been tickled by the puzzled expression of Reuben's face, as his son tried to pull himself up and continued, with a half-apology:

"I suppose I have something of the vagrant in my blood. You will think so if I confess that I dislike to be chained to a part of the world, to feel that here I must live, and have all my little amusements, and suffer and die and be buried. It makes me inclined to hate the place. In what sense do we really possess it. No man can *possess* any part of God's earth in such a sense as to keep his brethren from enjoying it. If he does, his selfishness is arrant. And if he lets the other men feast on it with their eyes, so that its beauty can sink into their hearts, and it becomes a part of their"—he was going to say "individual consciousness," but corrected it into plainer English—"their very selves, in a certain sense they possess it too."

"Are you joking?" asked Reuben, leaning his elbows on the table and looking at him as he would have looked at some natural curiosity.

"No, I am in earnest. If I never talked to you in this way before, it was because I knew you would think me mad. But it is not madness. I am in sober earnest when I tell you that long ago, as long as when I first began to think, it seemed to me that what we call the 'economic relations' of society are all rotten and confused. That one set of men should claim the land for themselves and others should be condemned to stifling workplaces with insufficient wages and pigstyes for houses, seemed to me something terrible. And what do we gain by it? When we are dead, both of us, these trees may be cut down, or the ground let into building leases. The water may go on sparkling as merrily as ever, or it may be blackened by manufactories. In either case, six feet of earth will serve us for our graves, and it will be of little consequence that we once had the temerity to call the place *ours*."

Reuben's face looked only somewhat paler and more mask-like than usual, but the hands shook which he still rested on the table.

He was a Radical in so far that he would like to humble the pride of the aristocratic class of the human race; but he had nothing in common with the democrat who would relentlessly pull down the very heights which he had slaved to reach. There were certain distinctions of wealth which he considered to be binding upon the world at large, and the people who rebelled against them should, according to his creed, be treated as lunatics or criminals. To attempt to alter these distinctions by the slow processes of evolution, which were not in keeping with the ideas of vehement youth, would have been almost as abhorrent to him as Godfrey's denunciations. He himself was ready to fly out in imprecations and furious words, and his passion was almost aggravated by his attempts at self-control.

He got up and paced the room with heavy steps, the perspiration standing in beads on his forehead, and there was such a concentration of wrath in his low, vehement voice when he murmured: "What are ye driving at now?" that it cost the son a greater effort to answer than if he had been addressed in the roughest and coarsest tones.

The old tendency to stammering which, in the earlier part of his life, had prevented Godfrey from ever making an orator with real success, and which had so effectually closed his lips when he would have done better to answer Vere, came upon him as he tried to reply, courteously yet firmly:

"I beg you to rid me of this wealth. Enjoy a part of it during your lifetime, and after your death let it be divided amongst the people who need it most. My own belief is that, as the world goes on, the personal possession of large tracts of

land will become a thing impossible. It will no longer give some few undue control over the happiness and industry of the majority. That moor, or even a part of it, is not yours. That we should fancy we are the sole possessors of even a part of it is inconsistent with the freedom and welfare of a large number of people hereabouts."

He spoke hesitatingly, as if he were reciting a lesson, as in truth he was. He had repeated the words to himself previous to the interview, as if he were aware that his was one of those natures with impressionable nerves, which are likely to appear at their worst in a difficult emergency.

His keen sympathy for suffering of any kind, especially the inflicting of disappointment—hardest of all in the case of his own father—made it well that he had done so. For Reuben—who had been annoyed beyond expression on the previous night, and could not bring himself to believe that he was face to face with an obstacle which he had not strength to overcome—was now fairly dazed.

"Bosh!" he muttered, "the lad is worried and queer."

That the prize on which he had so certainly counted should be ready to escape him seemed incredible enough. But that his son should be losing his head!— He began to think of medical nostrums, and determined to consult a doctor that very afternoon.

"I don't know how to make you see my side of the question without seeming to be priggish," said Godfrey, in tones of apology.

He was perfectly well aware that his father must think he was endeavouring to bring down the existing structure of society, and he did not feel much like a vigorous Samson to make it totter to its foundations.

"Ridiculous humbug!" again growled Reuben, who had certainly no fancy for the redistribution of the property which he had worked so hard to acquire.

How would it be possible for Godfrey to break to him the novel idea that he might distinguish himself by taking the part of a philanthropist, and be thankful for the opportunity of getting rid of his millions by sharing them, as a means of enjoyment, with the people? It would have taken generations to produce a man like Reuben, who could be properly grateful for the coming change. His son represented *himself*. All his hopes for the future had been centred in him.

The purple shade on his face grew darker and deeper, as Godfrey tried to explain.

"You told me the story of your childhood last night—it was kind of you to do so—but you told me nothing of the means by which you made your wealth. Forgive me if I say that some

sort of confidence of *that* kind is needed between a man and his heir—I do not say a father and a son, though one might suppose the confidence would be increased by ties of blood—but some lessening of reserve in most cases is necessary for the proper enjoyment of a property which has been acquired—in—in——”

“So you wish to make conditions before you accept what I have to offer ye? I call that a queer start,” said Reuben, irritated into vulgarity.

“And yet you, on your side, wish to make the inheritance of your fortune conditional on my marrying some lady whom you choose, though that condition may not be agreeable to the lady. You have a perfect right to do so,” he said, with an apparent calmness which Reuben felt to be still more irritating. “No one can dispute your further right to reserve to yourself the secret of how that fortune has been acquired. I should be impertinent to inquire into more than you have chosen to tell me. But, at any rate, I may withdraw from my share in arrangements of which I know nothing. Our opinions as to the management of such property are altogether different. My position was difficult from the first; I do not see any hope of its becoming easier. Your money can only be mine on conditions, and I foresee that fresh difficulties will constantly arise between us.”

“One might think you’d been rehearsing in a penny theatre,” sneered the angry father, as Godfrey continued:

“Some of these difficulties are conscientious ones to me, and a man cannot easily submit to conditions where his conscience is concerned. It is not merely your opinion about marriage, but your opinions about nearly everything are the opposite of mine. This is our misfortune—not our fault. Heaven grant that you may live to a good old age, but by that time I shall be a middle-aged man, forced for the best years of my life to submit to spending money on my own luxuries—money which has been wrung from others by modes which——”

He was going to add “which do not commend themselves to me,” but stopped himself in time.

Reuben muttered something about the infatuation of the lad, and his indifference to all the gold which had been lavished on him.

“There are plenty of philanthropic institutions which would be glad of it. Why not leave it to them?” Godfrey said, beneath his breath.

But, low as he spoke, the older man heard him. It was the final blow. All his plans were foiled. The dream of the projected marriage had collapsed like a soap bubble. Only in a heated moment had he let words fall about the history of his

life which he now would have given much to recall. It was what Godfrey had said which had forced his secret from him. He regretted too late the moment of weakness, and said, in his loudest voice :

"Then if you are in earnest—if you prefer to make me miserable—to see me beggared in my old age rather than remain and make me happy, you must go your own way. You would curse me wi' beggary, and in spite of all I have done for ye—you refuse to remain by me. Go, and be d—d."

The ugly purple was deepening on Reuben's face, and he looked as if he would have liked to detain his son in the vice of his strong grip. Tragedies in real life are generally quiet. In this case as in others there was little more froth of words to betray the turmoil which was raging within the hearts of both men.

The same spasm of pain which had passed over the elder man's usually impassive face was repeated on the son's.

"Look here ; I don't mean to be rude to you, father. I owe you a great deal. But we have had too much argument already on some of these matters. We shall never agree. Spare me your reproaches."

The storm of passion in Reuben again tried to get to the front ; but the evil words which he was ready to utter seemed to be strangled in his throat.

"I will not be cozened into——" he began, but could not finish his sentence.

Overborne by his son's unexpected energy, and his vain attempts to cow him into submission, he gazed at him for a few moments in stupefaction, and then broke into half-derisive laughter.

Godfrey fairly hid his face in his arms and groaned. The indelible recollection of that laughter haunted his memory afterwards. It was even a relief when Reuben regained his voice sufficiently to say :

"I wash my hands of ye ; I cast ye off from this moment. Let me never hear your name again."

"Perhaps it will be better," said the younger man, trying to speak calmly. "It is a solution of the difficulty which would have come badly from me ; but, now that you suggest it yourself, it may be the only one for both of us. You tell me things with no permission to reveal them, and our way of looking at nearly everything is diametrically opposite. I have too long stifled my convictions, and dreamt the dream of an epicurean. It is time for me to prefer labour to slothful indifference. It will be better for me to be independent of substantial aid. Do not think I am raving, and do not trouble yourself. I shall not bother you. I will leave so quietly that

there shall be no scandal about it," answered the younger man.

It was like a bad dream to him afterwards to remember his father's answer.

"Go and try to earn money, to be free from the burden of my charity. Go and get enough with your white hands, and fling it in my face."

The words rang like thunder in Godfrey's ears, who had a sensation as if he had been in long confinement, when at last he reached the outer air.

In less than a couple of hours afterwards he was turning his back on Tarringmoor. Still the echoes of that angry voice seemed to be ringing in his ears, "Go and try, you simpleton; ye can do nothing for yourself," as with a small portmanteau, containing all that he cared to take away of his worldly goods, he made his way across moor and lane. Long afterwards he remembered the clucking of the hens in the poultry-yards, and that it was the time when the clematis began to run to seed, as his eye had been attracted by the appearance, like white foam, on some of the bushes—in spite of his dizziness. Voices were calling, and dogs barking from some of the gardens which he passed, and a girl lingered at the door of one of the houses, watching him with some curiosity. At Tarringmoor he surrendered his portmanteau to a small boy, and quietly nodded to some of his friends as he took a third-class carriage to London.

He had always travelled first-class before; he thought it was a pity he had been so lapped in luxury. Unfortunately he had been brought up like a gentleman at leisure, and had led a useless, if a harmless, life.

"Well, it is never too late to mend—and to show that I can do something for myself," he thought, trying to laugh at his own excessive feeling, which seemed to be out of all proportion to the change in his circumstances.

"It is only that I pitched my ideas too high; but that would scarcely account for my being so terribly unstrung," he said again, as he wiped the moisture from his brow, and knew that it was not only for his father's mortification, but for the woman whom he had left behind, for whom he was so distressed. "Better, after all," said the same inward voice, "better that you should go away, even for *her* sake. You will be a dozen times as strong to resist the temptation of falling into a plan of which you do not approve, and resisting temptation in her absence."

"If I love her," he repeated, "should I wish to work her misery?"

The very argument made him realise that he was hoping one day to regain the affection which, he told himself, he had been so unfortunate as to lose by a blunder.



Part V.

My motto is—content with this ;
Gold, rank, I prize not such.
That which I have my measure is ;
Wise men desire not much.
Men wish and wish, and have their will,
And wish again as hungry still.

From Claudius.

CHAPTER I.

IT cannot be said that Reuben Sellwood had any serious fear of the result of the angry conversation which had taken place between himself and his son. That Godfrey should leave his luxurious home as suddenly as a nomad leaves his encampment—who strikes his tent, and, when the morning comes, the place which had known him knows him no more—had never occurred to him as possible. It was true that Godfrey had shown a special aversion for the pageantry of wealth, but there could be no doubt that he enjoyed all the little comforts to be derived from unostentatious luxury. And in this respect Reuben had deferred to his son's taste. Reserved as he was himself, he was not sorry to learn by degrees how essentially the details of an English patrician household of the nineteenth century differed from the somewhat more barbaric show of the century which had preceded it.

Godfrey had persuaded his father to dispense with unnecessary servants, to prefer swift and smooth-rolling carriages to the spectacle of gorgeous liveries, and simple meals perfectly served to more costly dinners. But these things, as he knew, were second-nature to his son. Delicately nurtured, and with

the refined tastes of a woman, it did not seem to Reuben possible that his "poet" could exist without the gold of Dives to minister to his tastes.

Consequently he whistled to himself more in amusement than in discomfort when it appeared that the young man had not occupied his bed on the night in question.

"He had taken a constitooshinal," so Reuben pronounced it; "it 'ud cool him, and bring him back to his right senses."

But when he waited a week, and there came no message from his son, he began to think that Godfrey's ferment of opinion was unusually long in subsiding. Another week passed, and still no message or letter. Then it was that by degrees Reuben began to comprehend how the young man had taken him at his word, and how it was possible that Godfrey might, after all, have acted not from impulse, but from definite purpose.

Had Godfrey's nature been more superficial, or less easily wounded by that which seemed to him coarse interference with his own personal feelings, there might have been more hope for Reuben. He had insulted his son and bid him depart. Nothing could recall that son now.

After a week's interval, the expected note arrived. It bore no date, and the post-mark proved to be misleading.

"If I had thought it possible," Godfrey wrote, "to say 'good-bye' without rousing further ill-will, I would gladly have done so. I thank you for all your kindness in the past. You were right to take the opportunity of getting rid of me. I could no longer have satisfied you, or have fulfilled your wishes, and you would have taken umbrage every time that I ventured to declare my opinions. Even if I could have succeeded in generally stifling my thoughts, the situation would be strained, and you would infallibly have tired of me. I could no longer find nourishment out [of the narrow-necked bottles which you thought would be sufficient for me. It might have ended horribly.

"Fate has spared us both much misery in bringing matters to a climax so abruptly. If in any way I hurt your feelings I beg a thousand pardons. *Don't trouble about me.* Why should I be pitied even if I were to return to the people from whom you now have told me I have sprung? I have hands and can work. I have brains, and I can use them. I hope, when you think of it seriously, you will find nothing worthy of condemnation in the step which I have taken. Since I cannot recompense you in the way that you wish, nothing remains for me but to take you at your word, and relieve you of a presence which has become wearisome to you. To renew the contest would be worse than useless. Silence, in a case like

this, may be for our common interest. But, if I may ask one favour, I would say arrange everything with regard to money independently of me. *You* know the amount of your fortune; I neither know nor wish to know anything about it. But, if possible, I should like you to make the lady, whom you used so justly to admire, sufficiently independent to be able to continue to live in the house which belonged to her forefathers. Do not blame me for pleading *her* interests rather than my own. She and her little cousin have been brought up in a way likely to make privation exceedingly painful to them, and Sir Ralph's health is in a state which is far from satisfactory."

The letter had been a rambling one and difficult to write, for how could he tell his father that, if that father had trusted his secrets to him before, he (Godfrey) would have refused to be made an accomplice in such folly.

But the following mysterious missive which Vere Rashleigh received about the same time had been more difficult still to compose. Godfrey felt, in writing it, so much like the hero of a French melodrama, whose situation resembled his own, that he was abrupt rather than sentimental in composing it.

"Thank you for opening my eyes to see the ridiculous figure which I must have cut, not only in your sight, but in that of all other sensible men and women. Pardon me for having made you suffer. I will do my best to make amends, even though I do not feel yet as if I were equal to making a defence. To enter into a lengthy explanation, and to shift the burden on other shoulders than mine would do no good to either of us. I feel as if I have been guilty of a foolish act, and have brought fresh misfortune on one whom I love better than any one else in the world. My only resource is to leave the place in which I ruined myself by my own imprudence, nor shall I venture to address you again at present. I have no cause for complaint.

"It is no hardship to break with the past, and to set out as other men have done before me, with my little boat, alone into unexplored waters. Probably it matters nothing to you whether I sink or swim. To prevent the former catastrophe, I may hold on to some bit of wreckage, but in that case you will never hear of me. If, to take a more hopeful view, I can grapple with the current as other nobodies have done before me—if I can make a name or have something to offer you worthy of your consideration—I may again address myself to you in the future. Till then be kind, if it is not too much to ask from you, to my father. I leave him with some anxiety; and, if you can do something to help him from falling a victim to melancholy or cynicism, it will be such an act of kindness that I may perhaps take it as a token of forgiveness."

He wrote this last letter from a boarding-house in a crowded

part of London, intending to give it to a North-country woman, who was passing through town, to post. And, as he finished it, he dared not scrutinize it. Some instinct which he could not resist had prompted him to write the two last sentences. And he knew that the one touch of nature might read like an impertinence. Was it vanity, or something which was naturally sanguine in his temperament—and which, in spite of his self-distrust, had kept him up more than once in his past life—that had led him to talk still of the possibility of making a name, when the chances were becoming less and less in his favour? He asked himself the question in self-mockery; for he no longer felt like one who had a mission to help his fellow-men. All enthusiasm to put straight the things that were out of joint in this world's economy, had been damped by the personal necessities which were already forcing themselves upon him.

The story is one often told. This device of coming to London was simply a manœuvre for losing himself. And the rate at which London was growing was so rapid that it made the young man hope he might easily elude all pursuit in it. A corner of a city in which speculative builders were beginning to calculate that sixty thousand fresh comers might require housing every year, was the least likely place for a man who wished to hide himself to be easily found out.

Godfrey (he had determined to drop the name of Sellwood, but scorned to practise deception in the matter by assuming another surname) came to London, with a fair amount of money in his pocket, in the month of September, when the Parliamentary session had been for some little time over, when the usual exodus had emptied the great city of some of the more influential of its citizens, and when a man could walk the streets without being jostled or elbowed by his neighbours. But for this very reason, as he quickly realised, there was more fear of attracting notice than at other times.

At the great hotel at which he stopped for the first night, he remarked with a sort of alarm that guests were no longer kept waiting for their newspapers or their claret, and that they could eat their mutton cutlets in an atmosphere no longer so heated as to drive sanitary reformers wild. Out of doors, it was the same metamorphosis. The cabmen had adopted a tone of most unwonted civility, and the attractions of Kensington Gardens could be feasted upon by a lover of Nature without fear of being disturbed by the presence of a fashionable mob. Godfrey could almost have sketched in Hyde Park, and the waiters at the hotel were so far more attentive than he had intended them to be, that he made up his mind not to linger in it more than one day.

During his wanderings on that day, his attention was attracted by a private boarding-house in the neighbourhood of Great Coram Street. It was as shabby as it was possible for a house of the kind to be, and the terms were certainly very inexpensive. And to listen to the high-flown account given by the lady who "had seen better days," but who now deigned to preside at the head of this establishment, it appeared that Wealth no longer had it all its own way in this world of ours. The amount of influence, quiet society, usefulness, amusement, and variety which a man of happy disposition might secure for himself by paying a small sum of money for the treat of residing in that house proved that rich dullards were no longer to "rule the roost," as they had in former years.

Madame de Maurice proved to be the widow of a retired naval officer, and some of her envious female friends suggested that it was "in no way consistent" to put a "de" before her name, and that she had obviously no right to the title of "madame." But she was certainly affable. And such a tempting picture did she draw of retiring friends, who liked to be as quiet as Godfrey himself, but who by their looks, accomplishments, and conversation would adorn the rooms of any duchess in England; of the simple music in the evenings, the attractive little dinners, and luxurious easy-chairs afterwards, that Godfrey—reflecting like Milton of Mirth, "these delights if thou canst give"—decided that many a homeless wanderer might do worse than live with her. He certainly remembered with a sort of pang that finished household cleanliness had been a desideratum in that programme of comfort which he had been wont to picture to himself with paradoxical complacency as "living simply and self-denyingly" in the past. But beggars could not be choosers. And Matthew Arnold himself—supposing him to have a pocket which was rapidly becoming empty—might have been obliged to put up with a few Philistine atrocities, or even with a lack of "lucidity" in his enforced companionship. Besides, as Godfrey reflected, no one would be likely to seek him out in a house of which the windows were rarely cleaned, and where the Venetian blinds had contracted so artistic a covering of dust that it was impossible to guess their original colour. To sleep in a stifling attic and to dine in a dingy parlour in this nondescript place, seemed to him far safer than to linger in any hotel. In this place he would have a breathing-space to look about him and determine what he would do next.

The dinners turned out to be badly cooked, and the society which he had been promised altogether dolorous.

But he was already beginning to arm himself unconsciously with a new sort of callousness for these small disappointments,

and was able to find a sort of attraction in studying the strange characters who would have been bruised like himself, in their battle with life, if they were not to a certain extent impervious.

To be sure the ladies in general were loquacious enough. There was Madame de Maurice, who appeared with untidy cap and yellow, wrinkled face while superintending the unappetising dinner by daylight, but who emerged like a gay moth out of a chrysalis in the evening, with plaits of hair of a different colour from those which she wore in the morning, and a *soupeçon* (as she called it) of rouge on her cheeks, as a compliment to the inmates of the house. Then there was the old maid, who had been the beauty of a provincial town in her youth, and who liked, as madame explained, "to keep it up" by introducing sentimental stories respecting her conquests in the past—anecdotes which generally could be skilfully "led up to," whenever there was a hiatus in the talk at the dinner-table. She still sang sentimental songs, and accompanied herself on an old cracked piano, while a genuine young lady would stuff a pocket-handkerchief at the same time in her own little red mouth, and indulge in bursts of explosive laughter whenever she thought it safe to do so. The "mamma" of this young lady allowed it to be an open secret that she had an object in going about from boarding-house to boarding-house, because—as she gave out in loud and pointed whispers—she thought it right that all young people should be allowed the opportunity of looking about them a little, otherwise how could one expect them to "settle in life"?

There was, an open competition between this girl and another who prematurely wore spectacles, talked of nothing else but the higher education for women, and gave out with clasped hands that she thought life was far too short for all one had to learn in it, and that she, for one, would "never, never think of submitting to such a yoke of bondage as marriage."

"Wait till you are asked, my dear," retorted her rival, with another little burst of sarcastic laughter.

But worst of all, perhaps, was the middle-aged, aggressive-looking woman, with red face and hair cropped short, who supposed that she had a mission for reforming the diet of mankind, and was in the habit of taking a subscription-list out of her pocket and handing it to every one with a semi-defiant air.

The old men—Godfrey did not see any young ones—talked comparatively little. There was the respectable literary gentleman, of whom Madame de Maurice spoke with bated breath, who was supposed to edit some social magazine or newspaper—nobody exactly knew what—and who had a habit of gazing

sublimely before him in mid-air, as if he were superior to all mundane concerns.

There was another old man, said to have great interest on the Stock Exchange (he had just retired from the head partnership of a haberdasher's shop), who snored away most of the evening in a comfortable arm-chair which, when he first saw the drawing-room, had been one of the special attractions to Godfrey.

He invariably led the conversation to the subject of gout and sciatica and the advantage of wearing electric belts, but could discourse on no other subject. The other lodgers consisted of a sickly-looking, middle-aged man, respecting whom there was also an *on dit* that he was a great tragic actor; an unknown artist said to sell a number of his pictures in America—nobody heard much about his selling them anywhere else; and a spiritualist who was more mysterious than the others, because he always put his finger on his lips whenever any one mentioned the subject of spiritualism, talked in an impressive style about séances, and said "Hush," in a solemn way, when any one requested him to enter into detail.

Godfrey's impression after the first night was that he had entered a sort of lunatic asylum; but, on venturing to suggest this idea to the mild performer of tragedy, that oppressed-looking person was startled into answering:

"Oh, no. Of course not, sir—very respectable people here."

"People out of the common?"

"That's it—people out of the common groove—as I should put it. Superior woman, very superior woman, sir, Madame de Maurice?"

The question did not seem to require an answer, and, as it was always vexing to Godfrey to stand in the attitude of a cynical judge of other people, he tried to accommodate himself as much as possible to the discordant elements of the somewhat eccentric phase of life into which he had been introduced. It was something to escape for a time from "Society" (as Mrs. Austin called it) with its convenient hypocrisies and its bland untruths which he began to think were too often a mask for treachery and backbiting—something to be able to try his theories in a new atmosphere in which people were neither rich nor vain of their antecedents. "If a cannon-ball," as he said to himself, "had taken off one of the legs on which he had been accustomed to depend, why, the sooner he got used to a wooden substitute the better."

"'The necessity for pinching,' as Charles Lamb says, 'adds to the enjoyment of possession,'" he remarked, airily, that evening to the uncommunicative literary man who was said to

edit a magazine, hoping to enlist his interest in a shabby copy of Wordsworth which he had just picked up at a bookstall.

"Charles Lamb got money for *his* mots," growled the old fogey by way of answer, looking as usual straight in front of him with two bleared eyes which seemed to have been too hard at work to become accustomed to the sights of the world around him.

CHAPTER II.

IF Godfrey did not make much progress in the good graces of his new friends at the boarding-house, he had a still more damping experience of the outside world. Vexation and disappointment such as he had encountered at Broadmeads were not likely to take a firm root in the nature of one so young. Even as he wrote to Vere Rashleigh, risking that rash prophecy about the possibility of "making a name" for himself and offering it to her, he had been conscious of an upspringing of the heart to meet his altered circumstances. He had all the intense hopefulness of most young aspirants for literary fame, for after all he had little to depend upon but his pen. His violin-playing was useless for making money, and he did not suppose there was any back-door for making his way into that which used to be called the "sister art." And even if he had exerted himself to take high honours at Oxford, which he had not, his change of name would have rendered such success practically useless.

He had at first said vaguely to himself that there were "secretaryships, clerkships, and all sorts of appointments by which a properly educated man could earn bread-and-butter for himself." But he had no introductions, no friends, and began to understand, after a few useless applications, the blunder of which he had been guilty.

It had rankled in his mind that Vere had misjudged him, and he did not like to "be lumped with the rank and file," who were worth nothing for their intrinsic merits, but were to be valued simply by the amount of worldly goods which had fallen

to their share. But it soon appeared that the editors of London newspapers and magazines misjudged him also. On the second and third occasions when his brain-children were "returned with thanks," he was collapsed as with a shock of cold water. He was one to be keenly alive to the atmosphere of censure, measuring himself very readily by the opinions of other men who had more experience than himself; and it was as if a blighting wind had passed over him, paralysing his energies. The latest poem, which had been dandled like the latest baby by a tender mother, was not returned to him at all. Probably it went into the editor's waste-paper basket; and Godfrey—who needed a little approbation on which to prop his small remnant of self-appreciation—found himself all at once without a spur for his powers.

At St. Anne's, though he had been reticent as to speech, he had found satisfactory occupation for his pen. But the essays of which his college tutor had sometimes spoken in high terms of encouragement, and the poems which used often to find a corner in the columns of the undergraduates' magazine, were useless now, when, for the first time in his life, he had intended to work his hardest at them.

Truth to tell, he had not been so assiduous at his studies in the past as to justify him in hoping for a sudden success. But at St. Anne's his surroundings had been congenial, and his faculties had developed with very little personal effort. It was very different from entering upon this new chrysalis stage, which had to be gone through in a chilling atmosphere, quite incompatible with the unfolding of deadened wings.

For the first time he saw how foolish he had been in breaking prematurely with his connections. He was too proud to apply to friends. To do so would not be compatible with the letter which he had written to his father. And though he soon began to think he was no better than the stupid herd, and that it would be impossible for him to establish a proper footing anywhere, yet he felt as if he would rather pay the penalty for all that he had forfeited—rather die than go back to the old state of things at Broadmeads. If his father had cared anything about him, he would have advertised for the absentee. But no such advertisement had appeared in any of the daily papers. And Godfrey was perfectly certain that Reuben's pride would be as great as his own.

"He may marry again," he said to himself. "That is the likeliest thing for him to do. But he will never revoke a single word that he uttered to me. This sort of thing may pull a man about horribly, but he ought to defy it to break him," he reflected, trying to rally himself from the depths of despondency, when a short MS. on one of the social subjects of the day—

on which he flattered himself he had really something to say worth hearing—was returned to him with the usual formula.

"I have no introductions; not time for sufficient thought. You mustn't shake a thing, if you want it to set into crystals; and here am I pounding my poor brains. I can take to wood-carving, and then perhaps I shall have a chance to think a thing out, and may find a sale for my manual work."

But the rebellious nerves and overtaxed head seemed to make the "thinking" more difficult than ever. He determined one day to take a walk for the walk's sake, since the absence of riding, of cricket, and of football—all the exercises with which he had used to brace a naturally delicate frame—were beginning to tell upon his health.

It was an October afternoon, misty and cold, and as he made his way towards the slums in which he knew he must presently seek for a lodging, since even Madame de Maurice's modest tariff would soon be utterly beyond his means, the thought of this great, overcrowded nest of human ants—in which he himself was only one amongst thousands of little, fussy, restless midgets hurrying hither and thither, each with its own fragmentary burden—became somewhat overpowering. By-and-by the sun would set, and other ants would come to carry *their* little particles of grain, and all this human restlessness would take some other form. A man ought to be myriad-eyed and myriad-hearted if he were to feel for all the aggregate of sorrow, disappointment, bereavement, and despair going on in the great ant-hill at that moment. . So thought Godfrey, asking himself was there not a tendency in the self-seeking life which he had been obliged to lead of late to make a man gravitate lower, morally as well as mentally? He felt too weary and faint-hearted to be equal to any wide-sweeping flight of imagination. His own disappointments had certainly narrowed his horizon. But his thoughts reverted to Vere, who took the troubles of her neighbours to heart as if they had been her own. And a new idea occurred to him that as the old fogey in the boarding-house was said to be the editor of a *social* magazine, he might break through his reserve and offer to write for him. The land question, which was then comparatively new—though he could scarcely expect it to be understood by the slow-moving countrymen who were content to live and die as their fathers had done—was attractive to him.

And still more interesting was that greater question of promoting sympathy between man and man. If it was too much to hope that the present generation could reach by rapid strides a perfect system of "political jurisprudence," class might surely draw nearer to class, and so might the consolidation of

society be effected. These and a dozen other subjects occurred to Godfrey, as likely to be useful for essays. And he tried to draw the so-called editor into conversation. In this there was more difficulty than he had anticipated, as the somewhat surly literary lion insisted on gazing in a rapt way in front of him, and only glanced askance at his enthusiastic interrogator. When he spoke it was with a slight huskiness in his voice, and he said something, as if he had come down from the clouds, about the "unsatisfactory nature of the commonly-accepted explanations of the problems of life."

The lady who had a mission had overheard the last words, and commenced, in a loud, rasping voice :

"It would be as reasonable to look for grapes on thorns or figs on thistles, as for a strong, healthy body and a pure heart fed on innutritious, injudicious food. The impurely-fed body engenders every species of disease and——"

Madame de Maurice fidgeted nervously on her chair, and Mrs. Smythe, noticing it, proceeded condescendingly :

"I am trying to explain to these gentlemen that excess in diet is too often a form of starvation. You, my good friend, do not aim at excess. But, at the same time, if you could contribute to the Company which I am just now founding for the condensing of Swiss milk, you would never regret it. The advantages which we shall ensure for posterity are incalculable. Doctor Dawson—you do not know Doctor Dawson, do you?—he is one of the most celebrated medical men of these times. He said to me the other day, 'Mrs. Smythe—you do not estimate the importance of your own mission'—the *gigantic* importance I think he said—'for——' Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Godfrey," she suddenly exclaimed, observing signs of growing impatience amongst her hearers, "may I ask you to do me the favour of looking again at this subscription list?"

But both the men had taken refuge on the landing outside the drawing-room.

"We must be liberal to women," said Nicholson, speaking huskily, and looking straight into space still. "For my part, I adopt the plan of never seeming to observe them. The race would not continue without them, but we must not expect too much from their mental faculties. I suppose you are a German scholar. Schopenhauer says——"

What Schopenhauer said about women Godfrey did not hear; for a strain of music began on the old cracked piano, which made him start and peer into the drawing-room. It was a part of Beethoven's "Sonata Pathetique," and the woman who played it, even on that worn-out instrument, brought sounds of ecstasy from the notes, as if her soul were rising above all the pettinesses and irritating meannesses of that narrow room.

"She teaches music—she's the actor's wife," said Mr. Nicholson, contemptuously. "I was going to observe that our review has not yet started. We need money for the undertaking."

He took no notice of his companion's ingenuous embarrassment; it was most likely that he did not see it.

"If we wish to build up, we must begin with demolition. You are acquainted with our views."

Godfrey humbly observed that he was not.

"I need scarcely tell you that we have some of the most subtle and acute thinkers of the day among those who have promised us contributions. To explain our principles, they are anti-mawworm."

"Anti-mormon, or anti-nomian, did you say?" asked Godfrey, who did not catch the word.

Mr. Nicholson gave him a withering glance.

"To put the thing shortly, we make a clean sweep of the hypocrites—we scorn the conventional masquerades which others look upon as venial—parsons, for instance—especially bishops."

"Oh, I see," said Godfrey, disconcerted, "I should say that the parsons were some of the best people going, and that it would be impossible to find anywhere a body of harder working, more self-sacrificing men than the bishops."

"You are at liberty to hold your own opinions, sir. As society is constituted at present, no one can prosecute you for your mawworm ideas," said Mr. Nicholson, in great wrath. "You will please to remember that it was *you* who entered into this conversation, and proposed yourself as a writer for our social review."

"As I understand it, the social review has not come into being. I will have nothing to do with attempting to break a link of that chain which binds the affections of the English people to a noble and humanising institution like the Established Church," answered Godfrey, a little hotly.

"That is, you will talk about the progress of the species, and attack the little fry, but have no hits at the big guns," retorted the other, scornfully.

"Meaning the bishops?" asked Godfrey, with a laugh. "I don't flatter myself that my hits would be likely to affect them in the least in one way or another."

"Much *you* know about social reform."

"I never thought that I did know much," answered Godfrey, as he reflected that it was one thing to sympathise with the divine wrath of such reformers as Savonarola, even to the extent of letting one's own life be burnt up with the wrong, and quite another to go about like a maniac rooting up all that was

beneficial under pretext of destroying noxious weeds. He had made another enemy, which he could ill afford to do.

But after a time there came a little turn for him in the wheel of fortune. Not only did he obtain a small clerkship at a bank which occupied him during the day, but a minor magazine, entitled the *Family Enlightener*—in writing for which he flattered himself he could be of some use to the people—accepted some of his smaller articles. At one time it would have seemed to him intolerable to be obliged to turn himself into a reckoning machine in which the mind of a man must after a time be wrecked or suffer loss, but now the bread-getting had become so much of a necessity that there was no longer time for indulging in fastidiousness.

CHAPTER III.

"I MUST dare to be myself and to follow out my own bent," Godfrey had said to Mr. Nicholson when he declined to write for his periodical—which, by-the-way, never was started. But a duller or an uglier life it would have been impossible to imagine. To get out of bed betimes on a cold morning, to swallow down some bad coffee which has only just been made and consequently scalds one's throat, to ride on the top of an omnibus in a depressing fog, and only to reach one's destination in the City in the nick of time so as to escape what the other clerks called a "wiggling," to be subjected daily to a sort of work which involved pressure, anxiety, hurry, and so much expenditure of brain and nerve-force, and then to return in the evening to toil till past midnight at the fabrication of moral essays which could not please the editor of the *Enlightener* unless they were the very quintessence of commonplace.

Night by night, with a compunction which availed him nothing, Godfrey had to turn out a little string of the mildest platitudes. Anything of a sterner and more daring nature was invariably returned to him, and became so much waste-paper,

He had to address himself to the "gallery," and it soon appeared that the gallery liked thin and watery jokes mixed with a little good-tempered philanthropy. He found that the right thing was not to be afraid of boring his readers, but to repeat the same opinion or sentiment in a hundred different ways. No barrister had to be plainer when addressing himself to the capacity of a common jury. It is exhausting work to have to burn the midnight oil proving to one's readers that two and two make four, especially when a man has to be up by daylight, and to break his back over a desk at another weary process of calculation. Life held many prizes, but it seemed to the poor fellow, in these dark, wintry days, as if she held none at all for him.

Other men had companions, but he was frightfully alone in the great city, with no single friend. A sigh would sometimes escape him when he thought that, had Vere Rashleigh been of lowly rank, she might have sympathised with him and helped him in the poverty and the struggle with some sense of blessed companionship.

A single word would have answered his father. But, if it was to come over again, that answer would be "No." He sometimes thought that he had been wrong in hiding himself and dropping his surname, so as to cut himself off from the friends of his boyhood. More than once he had caught sight of one of his Oxford acquaintances, and had felt a little like Adam exiled by his own fault from a home which was as luxurious as a Paradise, but which he had somehow not appreciated, as he hurried on, looking, like old Nicholson, straight before him, hoping that no one would recognise him in his shabby clothes.

The only stimulant which he ever had for his jaded palate --amongst the charlatans and sentimentalists at Madame de Maurice's--was the music which now and again was played by Mrs. Shelton, the actor's wife. She had ear, feeling, passion, and though the voice was wanting, and the execution might scarcely have satisfied a modern audience, her music was so distinctly different from the jingling and strumming of other women that he wondered it was not more known and better remunerated.

"The fellow who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow, and helps his neighbours who do likewise, can scarcely be the better for a tendency to philosophise," he said sadly to himself one night.

And yet his pitifulness was growing stronger day after day for those other strugglers in the battle of life who were being worsted by his side, few of them having any idea of the un-

fathomable endowment of their individual souls, or a belief that God's eye was on them in their toil.

"They have enough to do to procure the barest necessities of this material life. Even Mrs. Shelton, whose music can only take her to the threshold of what is better, and poor Nicholson, who argues that humanity has been injured by striving after a will-o'-the-wisp-like immortality, or Madame de Maurice, who contentedly paints her face every evening and surveys all the questions which trouble the world with more or less equanimity—they are all alike in one respect : they have little thought for anything beyond the dreary present."

Never had Godfrey realised before how little opportunity for serious thought of any kind there was, not only in the lives of the poorest people, but also in those of the lower middle class. He had often, in his previous life, been startled, as other people were, at hearing of the real state of the "slums" of London, and could understand how a rich man was now and then glad to relieve his conscience by sending a cheque to some institution and inquiring as little as possible about matters which his instincts told him had better not be stirred overmuch. And, without wishing to indulge in pessimism or undue sentimentalism about the state of the labouring class at Broadmeads, he had recognised the true proportions of the difficulty and had disdained the money which was to make him important at the expense of the sufferings of others.

But he was conscious of no glories, fabulous or otherwise, connected with the toil for daily bread and the life which he was now leading at Madame de Maurice's boarding-house. Instead of stepping as a matter of course into an intellectual heritage, he was conscious of having to contend daily with the poorer side of his nature. The people with whom he associated had not only no time for church-going, but no time for self-recollection. The majority of them were humbugs, and the others ground down as he was himself, just as a steam-engine might be worn out by the incessant wear and tear of crank, and wheel, and boiler.

"Oh ! for a little rest," sighed Godfrey to himself, "for the sight of a green field—some release from this perpetual harness."

The poetical and emotional side of the man's nature inclined him to think sceptically, almost cynically, of the perpetual panegyric of work of which the world had heard too much. He was beginning to be over-tired by severe strain and mental effort, tossed about and ground out of shape like a poor waif of useless seaweed in the unfathomable depths of the ocean, carried hither and thither by the

tide. He felt a pang of remorse when he acknowledged to himself how very small a portion of his time or thoughts he had been able to give to those benevolent schemes which had exercised him so much as to cause the first rupture with his father.

"A fine sort of Gracchus I should make, pretending to take up the cause of the people when I have hard work to get my daily bread, with melancholy on the point of marking me for her own," he said, mockingly, to himself. "I must get out of this. I am doing no good by this treadmill labour to any one else, and the work is killing me—soul as well as body."

He tried to rally himself from nervous suffering by re-collecting a treatise of Kant's—which he had come across when he happened to be reading for "Greats"—on "The power of the mind to master, by sheer resolution, the diseased feelings of the body." But the philosophy proved to be worse than useless, and he ended by spending some of his last shillings in consulting a doctor.

The doctor's opinion was decisive. The patient was ordered a rest—rest in the sense of change of employment, if not in actual cessation from work.

"Man is a mutable animal, and should be subjected to alternate emotions," said the scientific adviser. "Now, my good friend, all this nervous suffering is partly your own fault. This growth of your brain, while you starve the other parts of your body—exhausting your system—will take its revenge on you. You must keep the balance more even. Have a little fresh air, a little more recreation, a more generous diet, and you will need no medicine."

Godfrey smiled to himself as he glanced at his thread-bare coat, and paid the necessary fee.

One thing was certain, that he must give up the ill-paid clerkship, or the writing for the *Family Enlightener*, or possibly both. How, then, was he to live? The doctor's words had cheered him a little, just as stars come out in the sky when a man looks up at them from a deep well. Godfrey, as I said before, was sanguine as well as sensitive, and he suddenly thought that he had not made enough of his love for art. Mrs. Shelton's music—which had revealed to him, even in the miserable atmosphere of Madame de Maurice's, depths of which, in his happier life, he had had little conception—had disgusted him more than ever with his own feeble efforts on the violin.

But his painting! If he could only sell his little sketches for a few shillings apiece, after all he might get as much by

them as by his miserable clerkship. At St. Anne's they had looked upon him as an artist in embryo. And though the very recollection of this had hitherto kept him from forcing his way into Art—since he had not sufficient vanity to think he could enter its domain without undergoing a long course of training—he now began to think of it as a change of employment. The vicissitudes of fortune had made him so much more modest that he thought, if he could only paint pictures which he could sell at the rate of half-a-crown each, there would be the joy of self-forgetfulness in producing these things, and the work might be lightened by the philanthropic fancy of supplying something which might be within the reach of those poorer "Philistines," the masses of whom doubtless needed some refining and elevating agent.

There was the artist at Madame de Maurice's—a Mr. Paul Hunter, who at first had seemed a trifle cold and unapproachable, but who had improved on acquaintance—perhaps he could give some hints. Hunter was more genial than Godfrey had expected. He styled himself an "assistant commissioner," and said, with a laugh at his own expense :

"I belong to the despised branch of the profession. But I used to have a friend who painted figures into my landscapes, always preferring to do the backs. The poor wretch died from overwork. If you think you can have a try at it—there'll be no harm done."

Hunter—who liked to keep up a delusion about his paintings—proved to be the producer of a number of tolerably capable drawings. He never dreamt of attempting a masterpiece, and his landscapes had all the faults of artificiality and rapid drawing. None of them were realistic, and all went for a low price. The conventional grace of his sylvan scenes, and the ordered pomp of his sunset skies—all more or less manufactured on the same ideals—would have called up a smile on Godfrey's face at any other time. But the artist was shrewd enough to see that the stranger had reached a feverish crisis of his life, a crisis that he had seen approaching inch by inch during the last few months.

"You see, I have no friends," Godfrey explained with a simplicity and want of reserve which was scarcely wise under the circumstances, "and my gifts are scarcely of the bread-winning sort."

With the tough mechanical difficulties of oil-painting he had never properly grappled ; but necessity is a stern mistress, and the delight of giving up the hated clerkship seemed to gift his fingers with unwonted cunning.

The "backs" of the figures proved to be so satisfactory that Hunter—who hated this part of the work—offered a modicum at once.

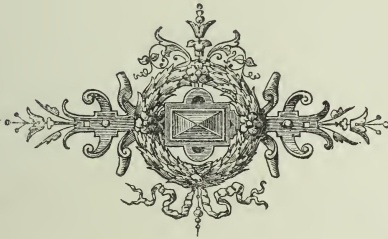
"I have not had sufficient training," said Godfrey, humbly.

"Oh! I don't believe in that," said his new friend, encouragingly. "Phidias never learnt. Half the anatomy of the R.A.'s is said to be at fault. Chemistry was never required to produce the colours with which Raphael painted. Michael Angelo never practised freehand—you stick to what I tell you; you'll do well enough."

The partnership went on jauntily, but Godfrey had to move to lodgings in a lower neighbourhood, where for a time he slept more soundly, with some of his bewildering uncertainties and forebodings at an end; but soon realised that, instead of his diet being better, he would have to take to potatoes and dripping, with a flavour of Yarmouth bloaters. The small cheques from the *Enlightener* had not come in as steadily as usual. It was becoming painfully apparent that this "family paper" did not make its way in the public favour. And though Godfrey still fagged like a galley-slave for his new taskmaster, working in the ground colours of all Hunter's pictures, and a good deal of the detail as well as the figures, there was apparently a plethora of these productions in the market. At one time, however, there came an order from a rich Australian, at another from an American. The bright idea occurred to Hunter that as etching was in fashion, and as it was an obvious disadvantage to himself, in whom the sense of colour was strong and keen, to take to black and white, his partner might try etching, as well as the other laborious parts of the joint trade. Manifold and delicate were the gradations which had to be employed in the black and white, and weary became the hand which laboured over them. Godfrey looked at them with a sigh when Hunter praised them. Freedom of line and spontaneity of touch were naturally wanting in them. Alas! they had to be produced like the essays for the *Enlightener* at so much a yard.

"I used to think," he said one day, with one of those sarcastic smiles at his own expense, with which he had to swallow down the dripping and potatoes, "I used to think that pictures were the waking dreams of men, in which they tried to give their neighbours some idea of the visions which had been vouchsafed to them of the Unseen. I have no doubt that

every artist sees differently. Colour always is a delusion. One man has a good eye for blue, another for red, and so forth. If one could get into the innermost sanctuary of somebody else's mind, what a revelation it would be ! But I have no time for such thoughts now. Hunter is only an artist's fag, and I am less still—I am Hunter's fag."





Part II.

Oh, my heart is sick a-wishing and a-waiting,
The lad took up his knapsack, he went, he went his way ;
And I looked on for his coming, as a prisoner through the grating
Looks, and longs, and longs, and wishes for the opening day.

JEAN INGELow.

CHAPTER I.

DRIP, drip, drip went the rain at Broadmeads towards the close of that August when Godfrey had so suddenly taken his father at his word, and set out to lose himself in what the Tarringmoor old ladies called sentimentally the "Great Babylon." The drip of the continued rain settled on the corn which was already cut in the fields, searching into its pith and marrow. There was no harvesting to be done while the dismal weather continued. Even when the wheat could be garnered, it would be sure to be damaged, and the yield of the year could not fail to be ruinously small for the farmer.

Sir Ralph Rashleigh stood looking gloomily out of the window of the breakfast-room at the dismal prospect, as if he saw the gaunt phantom of poverty standing before him, which indeed, to speak figuratively, he did. For the two neighbours were now—to use the expression of the common people round them—"at daggers drawn." Reuben Sellwood had not meant to force a quarrel when he upbraided Sir Ralph with his niece's pride. It was as if the words sprang from his lips without his will ; and, though the baronet made an heroic effort to restrain his own temper which he was rapidly

losing, there could never afterwards be even an appearance of courtesy kept up between the two men. No thought of real friendship had ever indeed been generated in the baronet's mind, but the horror which he had ever had of eating this man's bread and condescending to accept his favours, was greatly increased by Reuben's furious manner during the interview.

"The fellow cursed everything in heaven and earth—he talked as if he was cousin-german to the fiend incarnate," he said afterwards in justification of his niece's conduct.

At the bottom of his heart he bitterly felt that Vere had neglected his interests in refusing to be the link which was to join the two territories; and as the days passed on, and Reuben's son did not return to him, but seemed as if he had really left his home determined to fight on in a hostile way opposed to his father's wishes, Sir Ralph could not help being sorry that the girl had taken any part in the tragedy.

He remembered that the fellow had had a melancholy way of seeming to disregard the good things which had fallen to his lot in life, as if he were above them all. He remembered, too, the young man's delicate appearance, with fair complexion and blue eyes like a maiden's. He certainly did not look the sort of man to bear hard, unremitting toil, and to clench the nails into any sort of finished work.

"He will come back. He will change his mind," he said one day to Vere.

This hypothetical optimism she knew to be vain. She only shook her head.

"He will never change his mind."

"There will be nothing for him to do without introductions in London. And if he has changed his name, and given up all the benefits of his University training, the fellow is a fool."

"He is not by any means a fool," said Vere, speaking quietly, "but the wisest man cannot be content to do what fools can do sometimes."

"You mean to say he will take what common men may do?" Sir Ralph shrugged.

"Why not? There is nothing derogatory in work—if I had been a man now——"

Her voice was vehement and a little bitter, but she broke off in her speech, remembering how she sometimes reproached herself for not having better received her uncle's confidences.

"Why should she feel so unutterably desolate? She had refused the man, and could not help the consequences of her refusal. It was not logical," she said to herself at times.

Strangely enough her uncle did not reproach her with being

too precipitate. His prospects, as she knew, were inexpressibly cheerless. She began to think that she had behaved scandalously, if not dishonourably, to him as well as to Godfrey. But these ideas came too late. Unfortunately it was a part of this girl's character to have the impulse of expansive tenderness when the occasion for it was past. Over and over again she tried to reason soberly with herself, seeing as plainly as ever that any fate would have been preferable to that of commencing a married life with a sort of utilitarian contract which would be likely to rouse antagonism; and that nothing in all the world would have been so terrible as to add one more to those unhappy cases of a man and woman bound together by an indissoluble bond when neither could have any pity or sympathy for the other.

"I did right," she said to herself, "I would do the same if it were to come over again."

But unfortunately the exalted mood in which she had at first felt strung up to the highest pitch could not last without reaction. It might have softened the blow to Godfrey if he could have known that she sometimes burst into convulsive sobs in the privacy of her own room.

"Oh, I could not help it, but I must have seemed so ill-tempered, so hard, so unsympathetic," she said to herself, as tears fell fast and thick, and seemed to relieve the feeling of wild indignation so unusual with her, who rarely yielded to passion. "I could not have thought it possible I should turn into such a virago," she repeated more than once when, trying to ease the mental pain by physical exertion, she tramped as before through the muddy lanes, ministering to the wants of her poorer friends. But by degrees a new apathy seemed to come over her.

"It — it has lost me a friend," she said, "I hadn't counted upon *that*. He was better than any friend I ever had before."

She did not even then comprehend how anxious she was about Godfrey's fate, nor the necessity for loving which had been awakened in her too late.

Her uncle's conduct helped to open her eyes. Having nothing else to comfort him, he tried in an icy way to soothe himself with the oft-repeated declaration that he ought to have known a Rashleigh would have had too much spirit to submit to an alliance with the son of a neighbouring upstart. It took Vere's breath away to hear him speak of the marriage now as of a thing to which he could never have given his approval.

The reserve and pride had returned to his manner, and he confronted Reuben when he met him with a look of cold dismissal. The whole transaction was one which he would

willingly have forgotten, and it was almost absurd to see him trying to resume his place amongst those social idols which are balanced so high that it is difficult for them to maintain their position without tottering.

Sir Ralph's outlook for the future was dismal enough, and his daughter felt a little ashamed when she saw the efforts which he still made to stand correctly poised at a dignified eminence, while the life that he led was almost as devoid of luxury as that of Stylites on his pillar. The attempt was somewhat contemptible to Vere, who tried to calm herself by realising as she had never realised before, the small importance of her own short life and her trifling mistakes, compared with the immensity of life around her.

"Pride is a mean thing," she acknowledged to herself, "and one of its meanest ways is to think itself grand."

"The Infinite ! If I had only thought what that meant," she reflected, another day, in the same strain of thought, "I should surely have had more humility."

She had no one to teach her. But she began to ask herself with some compunction if her behaviour had been free from fault when she had acted as her own self-will had dictated to her. She thought pitifully not only of her own uncle, but of the other lonely man in the neighbouring house in a "wilderness-state" of loneliness and desolation, for which her own conduct might be partially to blame. Since Godfrey had taken her at her word, she was almost as lonely as his father. But she was learning to pray, while Reuben was cursing—the whole experience being not without fruit to her spiritual life.

The days dragged their slow length into weeks, and the weeks into months, but no news had been heard of Godfrey. Reuben, winding himself up into a pitch of further anger, refused to advertise or to make any efforts to recall him.

"I told him I washed my hands o' him, and I meant it. What manner of man is he? I fed him, educated him, and brought him up i' luxury, and this be the return he makes me. It is vile ingratitude," thundered Reuben. In the visions of the night he saw the young fellow looking pale and thin, and remembered how he had sworn to his dead mother : "I'll always stand by him and help him. The lad 'ill never ha' to contend wi' ill fortune as I have done."

But Reuben did not believe in dreams any more than he believed in the pains of hell or the joys of the blessed. All was naked and open to him, since he had eaten but little of the tree of knowledge. He thought he could fathom with his limited intelligence all the problems of life in the past and present, as well as its possibilities in the future. His assumption of omniscience might be a little funny, but the land of

vague shadows seemed to him to be the inheritance of the poet. And poets were to be despised and pitied.

Had not his lad had something of the poetic temperament? To natures as weak as Godfrey's, he would leave it to feel the pressure of the hand that was dead for ever, and the echo of the footstep that would never be heard again. Now that his son had left him, he saw how the antagonism had been great between them, and how there had not been one drop of the oil of mutual understanding to make their mutual relations work more smoothly.

He seldom ventured out now beyond his grounds, but once when he did so he met Vere Rashleigh, dressed as simply as ever, and with a new humility in her way of carrying herself.

She was determined to go out, not being one of those women who shut themselves up with any sorrow and nurse it. The whole neighbourhood had been ringing with different versions of her conduct as connected with the mysterious disappearance of young Sellwood. But it was a part of Vere's disposition not to care in the least for what anybody might think.

She had received her little note from Godfrey about that time, and a new sort of joy had sprung up in her heart as she repeated to herself:

"He loves me—he bears me no grudge, and he has shown that he forgives me by giving me something to do."

"Be kind to my father," he had written to her. Was not the injunction an absurd impossibility? She feared so. As she passed his now forbidding-looking father, she tried to smile with a nervous trembling of her lip.

"Curse her!" the unhappy man muttered to himself, with that thirst for vengeance which had been so inscrutable to Godfrey, vulgarising the higher attributes of his father's nature, and rendering his very motives unintelligible.

But, as Reuben muttered the curse, even his duller perception could not fail to make him notice the look of dumb sorrow on the girl's face. There was an appealing look, also, more difficult to interpret. Could he have understood that look aright, he would have seen that there was anxious questioning in her large eyes, an expression of doubt which, without any intention on her part, seemed to say: "What is he? Where does he come from? Are the stories which they tell about him true?" as—fearing still that the task which Godfrey had given her would be for ever too difficult, and that no one of the weaker sex could venture to interfere with this man of iron—she passed on.

"Others as young as I am have suffered far more—of course I knew that my turn would come—there is nothing for me to complain of," she thought, in almost the same words which

Godfrey had used of himself. She had always been one of those who take readily to self-sacrifice, and can scarcely think of good, as concerns self, apart from the good of others. This tendency made her liable to self-reproach, and it was with a feeling of numbness about her heart that she asked herself now: "Were there not countless Rubicons of hasty words, rash impulses, and unwise resolves which people—penitent like herself—could never cross again? We cannot live our lives over again. Regret may prevent mistakes in the future, but I don't see how it can help us about the past. And yet suppose any post or newspaper brought the news that Godfrey was dead—should I not feel guilty of manslaughter, and should I not be too severely punished?"

"I am so young," she muttered again to herself. "But was *he* not just beginning his life as well? And they know nothing about it—they can never guess that I really cared for him."

By an energetic effort of her will, she determined again not to show herself weak. Had she not heard that if we try to bear ourselves bravely, and to do our little tasks of work industriously, the daily commonplaces of life will become more insignificant and the little woes of life dwindle into nothingness? She told herself that nothing should make her morbid, but there was little to help the young philosopher just then in the dark and dreary outlook of her life.

Sir Ralph's icy manner to her had become harder to bear than ever. He did not even ask her to read aloud to him. He had his meals at times in his own apartments, and, when he met his niece in the evenings, he spoke no more than was absolutely necessary. If the life before her had not been so small and dry, it might not have been so hard for her to get through it. But Vere was not one of those people who find a martyrdom for themselves in the violation of natural law, profiting no one, helping no one. The determination not to be sentimental helped her to fight against the feeling that everything had grown nauseous to her, every dish, every dress. The environments of her life were meagre and dull enough, but even had they been comfortable and splendid she would have derived no happiness from the comfort or splendour at the expense of Godfrey's self-immolation.

She was rather glad that she had no pretty boudoir, as its right use, according to the derivation of the word, was said to be for sulking; rather glad too that she could devote herself to the education of her cousin, who had lately taken to growing, and whose lank girlhood seemed to herald the fuller development of womanhood. And she would have been wholly glad if

her uncle could have been made to see that his loss of money would furnish her with some sort of excuse for helping him, also in some definite way, so as to escape the workings of restlessness and discontent.

There was a ring of triumph in her voice when she said to him one day, as if she rather liked the excuse for saying it :

"If we had only belonged to the middle class! *There*, they tell me, it is getting quite the fashion for girls like me to do something for themselves, and such a fancy would never be thought strange, or excite remark."

"But we do *not* belong to the middle class," answered her uncle, waking from his evident preoccupation to answer her.

"Only it seems to me mortifying to waste the best years of one's life in doing nothing when one *could* help," she answered, with a deliberate slowness of speech which showed that the subject was not new to her. The calmness of her voice had the effect of rousing Sir Ralph from his usual indifference and apparent inability to answer.

"Are *you* becoming a utilitarian democrat like our neighbour's promising heir?" he asked, lashed into sudden anger.

"Oh! I did not mean to vex you. I would not distress you for the world," she answered, as she saw her days lengthening out interminably, and could almost find it in her to wish that the years, which seemed to be so tedious as they stretched out before her, were some of them over.

There was, at any rate, the guiding and orderly managing of the present rather assuming but poverty-stricken mansion. It required something like a stroke of genius to rule it with anything like a sense of beauty, combined with the needful thriftiness.

And, if Vere was forbidden to look out for any other outlet in her life, it calmed her strangely to think that the time would come sooner or later when the tiny spark, which she called her own earthly life, would be quenched with its small difficulties—if only she had done her best with it.

But, as regarded Godfrey, there was the possibility of the Terrible, the Unknown overtaking him in some form of calamity, and the possibility seemed to haunt her.

CHAPTER II.

AMONGST all the friends whom Godfrey had formed during his Public School and University life, there was but one who was determined to set his own resolution counter to that of the man who seemed, for some inconceivable reason, unwilling to keep up even a corresponding acquaintance.

The Hon. Charles Lloyd could bear any amount of snubbing, partly perhaps because, owing to his pleasant geniality and the circumstances of his birth, he had never really encountered it in its grosser form. He had three reasons for wishing to renew the friendship. First, he was curious on account of the air of mystery which it seemed to him Sellwood kept up about his belongings; secondly, he had a high opinion of Sellwood's capabilities, and thought it quite possible that some time or other in his life these talents might prove useful to himself; whilst thirdly, and not least, he had really an affection for the man. Armed with this triple reason, he determined to procure an invitation from some one residing in Godfrey Sellwood's neighbourhood. Fortune favoured him. He made the acquaintance of Mrs. Austin at a fashionable watering-place, and promised to come and stay at a Tarringmoor hotel in the month of September, to be near the widow lady, and to be introduced to some of her friends. If Mrs. Austin, who was his match in shrewdness, had her own surmises on the subject, it was to her credit that, as usual, she prided herself on entirely refraining from gossip.

Charlie had lost his time, as he speedily saw, with regard to the main object of his visit. All he could understand was that there had been some quarrel between the Sellwoods, and though he was too much of a man of the world to suppose that his old friend would remain in hiding, it was somewhat vexatious to be unable to gratify his curiosity respecting Reuben, who now refused himself to visitors.

There was but one set-off to this disappointment, and, faithful to his character of making the best of everything, Mr. Lloyd speedily forgot Godfrey in this compensation of Fortune. Mrs. Austin had introduced him to Miss Rashleigh, and Charlie was fascinated. Her colouring, he declared, was that of a perfect Hebe, if the expression of her face had not been too subdued for that goddess. He was ready to speculate

with all his usual enthusiasm as to the untoward causes which had condemned so resplendent a woman to such a gloomy corner of life.

September had set in with splendid weather. The farmers' carts were busy loading from morning to night, and though the wheat was much damaged, still the barley was pronounced well, and it was prophesied that there would be a plenty of sweet aftermath for sheep and cattle. Vere, ever interested in the prospects of the poor, was flitting about like another Ruth, helping the women to glean for as many hours as she could spare in the day. It enabled her to forget her own misfortunes for a time. And when Charlie saw her, and followed her into the fields—full of that little chaffing small-talk which he had found to be peculiarly successful in flirtations—he was annoyed by the dreamy look of absence in her face, as if she were only half with him in spirit. He had come in contact with so many other girls who had looked upon him as a "possible divinity," that he was a little disconcerted at this new experience of a young woman whose wits seemed to be wool-gathering, and who did not pay any particular attention to his remarks.

Vere, who had been so often full of life and spirits, tried to seem joyous still to others; and though there was sometimes a drooping of those spirits now—a sinking down to semi-despair when she was alone—it was evident that she strove with all her heart to bring her thoughts back from some far-off region, and to answer Charlie in the mood in which he would have liked to be answered.

Otherwise he was conscious of making no progress. She did not recognise the flattery of herself; she was untrained in these things, refreshing, and unlike most of her sex. And, if she every now and then answered him with a mild sarcasm which gave him the sensation of being "mentally rubbed," it was not—as he supposed—because she had been trained in that subtle school of society which makes so many women skilful actresses, but because she had a habit of speaking out her thoughts.

"I am getting the worst of it," he said to himself one day, when he had hazarded what he had supposed to be a neatly-turned compliment about the unkindness of keeping her hidden from the world "like another Danaë in a tower," and when she faced round upon him and answered, with a flush on her cheek :

"I am sure you do not mean to reflect on my uncle."

"Oh, no ! of course not !" he answered, a little startled, as she continued :

"I beg your pardon, but here, in this gossiping place,

they have got into the way of saying ugly things against people. Now, there is Mr. Sellwood——”

“Sellwood *père*?” he interrupted. “Oh! they say ugly things against him, I know. Now, I should fancy *he* deserved them?”

“Do they? Oh, dear, I should feel as if it were almost as treacherous of me to allow a word to be said against him as against my own relations.”

She spoke as if she were speaking to herself; but her fair face was puckered with trouble.

The amused smile with which he had been listening to her changed to something more serious. She was inadvertently throwing some light on a little of the gossip which he had overheard.

“Ah, yes!” he said to himself. “If Godfrey Sellwood has taken a fancy to her, they are just the two to get on together.”

“You *mean*——?” he began, tentatively; but there was something in his tone which set her immediately on her guard. And with an effort to disguise her depression, and to look at life in its commonplace aspect, she answered:

“I mean nothing at all. They say all sorts of things about Mr. Sellwood’s past life; but I know absolutely nothing. It is all a puzzle.”

“Ah! and the most miserable commonplaces are the enigmas of life. Why in the world should we torture our brains over the riddles, whilst others never lose appetite or an hour’s sleep in consequence of them?” asked the glib Charlie.

“Why, indeed?” she answered, taking his cue, as she handed a bundle of gleanings, with which he had positively been helping her, to a little, smiling village child. “I really can’t afford to spend my time in speculating and discussing them, any more than I have time to deplore being shut up like a Danaë because my uncle is not rich enough to go to town.”

“No,” she thought, as she forced herself to hum a tune on her way home. “*Here* at least I can make a few people happy, whilst a thoughtless life spent in gaiety—in a round of constant dressing, eating, and sleeping—would not help me to get rid of the inevitable.”

Mrs. Austin gave another garden-party in that September. It was one of those calm, ominous days which sometimes precede a midnight storm. The corn had been sheaved; there were no longer any reapers in the field, and a sort of Sabbath hush seemed to have fallen on the day. The garden was as unstirred by wind as if the leaves of the trees had been

cut out of paper and exhibited by artificial light, like the skilful imitation sometimes seen on the boards of a theatre. Only by the twitter of a swallow preparing for its flight, and the smell of upturned earth, might one realise the scene.

"Are you going out? It is too hot. Surely these errands of mercy might wait," Vere's uncle had said in the morning. But in the afternoon he had put no such restriction on her liberty. Young Lloyd seemed to be giving every possible guarantee of his devotion. And, though Charlie Lloyd was not rich, his elder brother was said to be in delicate health, and he might possibly come into the title.

And even if not? The lilies and roses would soon fade on Vere's young cheek; her eyes would soon lose their brightness. Sir Ralph's own health was growing still more weak, and, if the place which belonged to his ancestors was to revert to Reuben Sellwood, it would be best not to leave poor Sir Richard's child in the world without some natural protector.

Mrs. Austin had undertaken to see to Vere's toilet that afternoon. As usual, it was not expensive. But few could carry off a plain, closely-fitting white cashmere dress better than this fresh-looking, country-bred girl. She wore a wide-brimmed hat, trimmed by her own hands with daisies, and beneath its shade the eyes—so strangely of the same colour as Godfrey's, although of a deeper tint—seemed only to have gained a greater intensity by the anxiety which she had to bear.

Mrs. Austin tapped her playfully on the cheek, and whispered:

"You are looking lovely, child. The London ladies with their cosmetiques may well envy you your clear skin and that charming pink."

"And yet," the far-seeing matron thought to herself, as she watched Vere at a little distance, with the curly light hair wound becomingly into a knot, and the pretty girlish dignity shown in her unconsciously graceful attitudes, "yet, though she has all the signs of pure breeding from the neat little head to the pretty toes of her rosetted shoes, it is, as the baronet says, the 'beauty that is but skin-deep.' The features are not sufficiently regular to carry her through to my age."

It may be supposed that Charlie Lloyd did not look on so far. For as Vere stood in the doorway of the ivy-decked drawing-room—where the young people were to dance that autumnal night—divested of her hat, with her mother's jewels flashing on her neck, and the train of her simple dress falling back in shadowy folds, she looked to him a perfect picture framed by a becoming background. She did not see him at

first when he came up to her. For another figure had risen unbidden before her, and she tried in vain to dismiss it from her imagination. Where was Godfrey that night? Were his surroundings miserable? It was a strange freak for her fancy to play her. She had dismissed the man of her own free will. Was his shadow to be always haunting her?

It did not escape Mr. Lloyd's notice that, when he addressed her, she started as if from a reverie, and shivered as if a ghost-like memory had passed over her.

"Of what were you thinking?" he asked, ironically.

"I shall startle you if I tell you," she answered, unexpectedly.

He smiled in rather a superior way, and shook his head.

"I have lived too long in this world to be startled at anything."

"I was thinking," she said, slowly, "of an act of ridiculous pride which I shall always associate with this room. I did not mean to do harm; but it seems impossible to tell at present what evil consequences may result from that foolish act."

"Oh!" he said, beneath his breath. And then—as if guessing the reason of her confidence, and startled by the bitter dejection which was revealed to him—he added, "I can hear nothing from any of the Tarringmoor people of my old friend Mr. Sellwood."

"No, and something tells me we shall never hear anything but bad news."

"That is superstitious," he answered, "and yet, I confess, I am a little anxious. He had no idea of taking care of himself, brought up in that way."

"I have sometimes thought," she said, hurriedly, "that we may hear of his death, and then I have dismissed the horrible thought as impossible."

Charlie Lloyd did not answer, even when she added, beneath her breath:

"I could fancy him dying in London and making no sign."

"He is just the fellow to do it," he thought within himself; then, aloud, he said, turning quickly to her, and noticing that she was strangely pale:

"There is really no occasion for you to distress yourself. I mean to advertise."

"There is that clever Miss Rashleigh at her deep games again," said a lady who came into the room at that minute, and glanced meaningly at Vere. She smiled a sarcastic smile, and, if Miss Rashleigh had not been a baronet's niece, it is possible she would have passed her without any notice. She looked upon cleverness as an infectious disease, which, owing to her careful bringing-up, it was fortunate *her* daughters had escaped.

Vere noticed the sarcastic bow. It rallied her to the consciousness that her head was swimming, and that she did not want to make an exhibition of herself. An impulse to get help made her lay her hand lightly on Charlie's arm.

"I don't want to dance any more; the waltzes make me giddy to-night. Take me out into the moonlight, into the greenhouse—where I can get away from them all," she said, in a manner which made him understand, as he had never understood before, why she had always controlled signs of agitation, and yet had seemed so strangely absent. All was clear to him now, even in the whirl of his senses. For the first time he comprehended the curious absorption in herself which had hitherto seemed to make her deaf to his prettiest speeches.

She staggered as they went out. He felt her trembling, and found her a seat as quickly as possible in the conservatory. Ever afterwards the faint, sweet, subtle odour of the flowers, which seemed to be in harmony with her sensations, recurred to her as disagreeable.

"What was it? A little attack of faintness—giddiness—it was nonsense to make much of it," she said in self-excuse. She was battling still with the sense of pain and mystery—the uncertainty which had lately haunted her with respect to Godfrey's fate. She had almost forgotten Mr. Lloyd's presence. If she thought of him at all, it was vaguely to wish that, without being guilty of impoliteness, she could send him back to the drawing-room.

Presently he said :

"Have you nothing to found a guess upon? I would help you if I could."

"Ah, you can't—it's beyond your power."

"You mean that this generous anxiety which troubles you has become a demon not so easy to exorcise. But, Miss Rashleigh, you must rise above the weakness—you must dismiss it, and not let it not agitate you like this. There are others to make you happy. If I——"

There was something in his tone which sent a new dread through her. She looked altogether, as he thought afterwards, as if she were afraid of ghosts.

"Mr. Lloyd, you have laid me under an obligation, a great one, already." Her eyes, which were wide open, had still a look in them as of remonstrance, and as if they, more than the other parts of her body, were endowed with vitality. "Don't be too hard on my foolishness," she entreated. "I have made one mistake in my life already—don't let us make another. Had we not better talk of something else?"

CHAPTER III.

"YOU foolish, foolish child ! how is it you will always be your own worst enemy ?" said Mrs. Austin, about an hour afterwards, when she found Vere sitting alone in the conservatory, and coupled her disconsolate attitude with the abrupt disappearance of one of her most honoured guests from the ball-room.

Vere had sunk into a chair, and was feeling just then as if she were unable to stand, looking at her quiet companions, the flowers, through the chinks between her fingers. She was alone, and never in her life before had the motherless girl felt so much as if she would have liked to have wept in the arms of some tenderly sympathising woman, like any other girl yearning for help and advice. She had passed through a struggle, not an exhilarating one, which made her still feel more excitable and highly strung than usual. It was not in her to be conventional, or to attempt to hide the conscious red on her cheek. And as Mrs. Austin quietly closed the door of their retreat, Vere was debating the question within herself as to whether it would not be better to confide in some one, when that lady, in a direct, incisive voice, continued :

"To think you should be so good, so self-denying, and yet one of the proudest girls I ever knew ! It is really quite odd that you should look so fresh and simple-looking, and yet have the—the——"

"The pride of Lucifer," exclaimed the girl, sitting instantly upright, no longer blunderingly trying to make amends for disappointing Mrs. Austin in one of her most deep-laid plans, but longing to break down the conventions by which her life was trammelled.

"I suppose pride is a taint in the Rashleigh blood," she added a little sadly, and then the next moment she determined to keep her own counsel, and even had recourse to a feeble womanly pretext, though she hated herself for it. "I—I was feeling rather faint—and came in here to be alone, and not attract attention," she stammered, knowing the half-fib as soon as she had uttered it.

"And the faintness was *not* associated with the friend on whose arm you leant ?" said Mrs. Austin, quickly, excusing herself for the impoliteness of her speech on the score that

Vere had no mother, and she was responsible to Sir Ralph in trying to influence her.

"Are you not apt to fancy things?" answered the younger lady, saying to herself, "This sort of interference must be put a stop to."

"Ah, I was right—she is not quite heart-whole," thought the experienced woman, who prided herself on second-sight in these matters. "My dear, there is some one else," she said, seating herself beside her, and stroking her hand, "I knew it all the time."

"*What* did you know? Excuse me for saying you fancy things," exclaimed Vere, withdrawing herself from the caress with a look of supplication as well as terror.

"Don't be afraid of me—I shall not betray your secret. You sent that poor young Sellwood away in a tiff—excuse the word, but you are like myself, and I am conscious at times of yielding to a little infirmity of temper—oh, he will come back again."

The girl rallied herself. However kind the elder woman might be, she was quite certain *now* that she was not going to betray her feelings.

This sort of vivisection was intolerable. She suddenly found that she could rise to her feet.

"I don't like this kind of talk—you know I do not. I don't fancy most girls have those sort of ideas—that they can't be friends with a man without thinking of marrying him. I am not obliged to marry at all. I like my liberty too much. I don't feel as if I could give up my independence."

"But," said Mrs. Austin, in her most soft and purring tones, "you forget all the circumstances — there is your uncle."

"You may be sure I shall never marry against my uncle's wishes."

"Exceptional women may not care for marriage. A good many will find that they will have to do without it," answered the matron, significantly. And she turned and left the friendless girl to feel still more friendless than before the interview.

Throughout that night, which was unnaturally hot, Vere sought relief at intervals in long-drawn breaths. Her limbs seemed to have grown stiff, and there was an odd sort of aching in her bones. The storm which had been expected came about two o'clock; and the girl, finding her remedy for sleeplessness did not succeed, rose softly and undid the lattice of her window. The air seemed to refresh her and help her to struggle against the nervous restlessness. And yet as she gazed over the soaked heather and reeking ferns of the moor which was close to the garden of Mrs. Austin's house, and as

she listened to the murmur of the river swollen into eddies, she thought of another almost outcast life, hurrying as restlessly as that river towards the vaster sea. One might have thought that she was listening for a whisper and for softly-falling footsteps, as after a time she gently closed the lattice, and divested herself of her warm dressing-gown that she might force herself to sleep.

The storm, and with it the great darkness of the night, was over. The stars could still be seen overhead. They would soon be fading in the morning light, and the busily-peopled world would be rousing itself to its usual routine.

What was her life? The merest atom—like one of the dead leaves blown down on that soaking moor, and borne on in eddies and pools by the melancholy mud towards the darknesses, the silences. She shuddered and drew the curtain. After all, what right had she to any of these wild, yearning thoughts? What could it avail to look into any mystery with startled eyes?

"Oh, God!" she cried, as she tried to compose herself for sleep and to put out of her mind self-reproachful thoughts concerning that other soul—which possibly had been carried on to the dread expanse of another life where the hope of meeting seemed to be so small—or at best was being buffeted in the struggle for existence amid the busy thoroughfares and highways of earth. "And yet how I cared for him all the time! And it is I who drove him away and will be responsible if he dies—Oh, God, have mercy!" It was so short an exclamation that she did not recognise it as a prayer. And yet it was one of the first cries of a troubled heart which was athirst for God.

Mrs. Austin had not left her bed-room when Vere—scribbling a farewell message to her, and taking care to avoid Charlie Lloyd—set out waterproofed and goloshed on her homeward walk.

"Who was the young fellow making love to you, of whom Mrs. Austin tells me?" asked Sir Ralph, a few mornings afterwards, with one of those little flashes of irony in which he had begun to indulge of late. "Well, there is no accounting for tastes. Women are known by their lovers, whether they are of the vulgar and mean sort, or *vice versâ*. It seems to me, from the innuendo which Mrs. Austin makes, that I have been mistaken in you, after all, and your tastes are of the degrading kind."

"Oh, uncle!" said the poor girl, as she tried to sink into the depths of the old arm chair, "I assure you, Mrs. Austin knows nothing about it."

Why should I dwell longer on this part of Vere's life? Biographies may be written at length, but stories are bits of a man's or woman's life. And the years which followed for Vere were to all human ken very unpicturesque bits. What such years are in the life of every man or woman, or to the "great army of witnesses" watching their warfare, no human prophet can pretend to know!

They were years of trial, of struggle, of self-reproach, and of much misunderstanding, during which Vere did her best to be loyally true. She went her rounds of duty in the house or in the village like a child, her heart at times deeply stirred, and yet determining not to give way to her depression.

The mere behaving ill to his niece had done Sir Ralph's character incredible harm. It had not only established what was evil in his nature, but had blocked up the natural channel of his affection. He persuaded himself that Vere did not care enough about him to show resentment when she was unjustly blamed. And when the soft-footed avenger was closely on his heels, and the inevitable lot of all men looked him horribly in the face, when a new disbelief in himself began slowly to dawn in his mind, his conscience gave him a few twinges, and Dot as well as Vere had to suffer from his irritable speeches.

The child began to hate her home, and then it was that Mrs. Austin, who had shown a lack of her usual social dexterity in the way in which she had visited her disappointment on the elder of the two girls, took the younger one in hand. She persuaded Sir Ralph to send his daughter to boarding-schools, first to London, and next to Paris.

"You can't make young hearts beat in time to all the dry stuff written on your nasty old parchments," she exclaimed one day, when she had intruded into the baronet's study, and found him stooping over learned folios, though it was no greater secret from her than from the other gossips in the neighbourhood that the doctor's mandate had gone forth. Sir Ralph was suffering from heart disease, and ought to have fresh air and little fatigue.

"An old place fit for cats and mice," was Mrs. Austin's verdict, when she returned to her bright house. It was no wonder to her that the little vivid-hearted Dot had shown a thorough scorn for the "musty hole." The child was impulsive to a fault, no doubt, but it was intolerable to think that she should be condemned like her cousin to trying all her life to pick grapes off thistles. The mediæval influences of the house and lands had, no doubt, told upon Vere, who did not resemble the ultra-modern type of maidenhood, and whose bringing-up had been remarkably in keeping with her surroundings.

"An odd girl—a very odd girl indeed," Mrs. Austin invariably moralised; "but what can you expect when she has always been kept cooped up at home, with nothing to feed upon but the old leaves of this genealogical tree? Why, my dear, she can't even look out for dead men's shoes—the property's mortgaged—and, as to the family, why, her uncle's the last of his line. It's quite romantic. Interesting people in themselves, but moving in *such* a morbid atmosphere."

The remark about the morbid atmosphere became a hackneyed one, and at last was repeated to Vere, doing more perhaps to shake her out of her downheartedness than anything else.

"*Morbid atmosphere!*" she repeated, indignantly to herself, remembering that the sun partially behind clouds can never be precisely the same fertilising sun as if the skies are blue. To live a lonely, uncomprehended life had seemed to her at first, as it seems to all young things, harder than to die. She knew that she *had* been sometimes in a morbid state that autumn—a mood in which a shower of dying leaves on the chill, wet earth, the half-stripped branches of a tree blowing against the sunset sky, or, for the matter of that, even a barrel-organ brought by a wretched little Italian boy from Torringmoor to be played beneath the park gates, could bring "thoughts which lay too deep for tears."

But when she heard Mrs. Austin's remark she began more than ever to scorn herself for helplessness, and to show the courage and nerve of a dozen men.

She no longer said, "I can't drag on next year as I have dragged this." She no longer felt a sense of the intolerable slowness of time, as if the moment must come when she could sit still no longer; but she determined that the eddies and the gusts of wind which must come to her in the future should not interfere with the calm depths of her life.

I remember once hearing a story which was repeated in mockery of prayer. It was of a poor, untaught old woman, desolate and sorrowful, and knowing very few words, who complained to her priest that sometimes she could think of no prayer but an inarticulate one—it was "*Oh-h, oh-h!*" The man whom she consulted did not laugh at her, but told her that his own prayers had at times been almost as difficult to resolve into words.

Vere had been so far unfortunate that hitherto she had known no living people, with lives beautiful as their teaching, to help her forward. But the sense of awe at the depths which may suddenly open out of any thinking life lifted her

heart to the Eternal Father. And if her prayers were at first not much longer than those of the child with "no language but a cry," at any rate they were intense ones: "Lord, make me real—make me forget myself."

She remembered that the essence of sin was selfishness, and determined not to spoil the lives of others by her regrets.

Painful as it was to part with Dot—the little one looked such a bud of youth, so bright-eyed, and yet from over-indulgence so ready to take the least fault-finding to heart—Vere had not the heart to chain her to her own dull, gray present.

Her principal object in life was her uncle; next she thought of Reuben, and the task laid upon her in his case was doubly trying. But the outlook, which had been habitually sombre to Sir Ralph, became considerably lightened when Vere set herself daily to amuse and interest him. The old man had always tacitly counted on his niece's help, and the feeling that she was more than ever indispensable to him was in itself enough to make her life enjoyable.

Her attempts with Reuben were for a time entirely unsuccessful. But she persevered with the recollection of the good which she knew to be latent in every man, and which—as some means of making amends for her pride in the past—she thought it might be her duty to awaken in him. Her womanly intuition seemed to tell her that, if she could but look into his eyes with her own true ones, the harshness of his manner would be lessened; if not, she could only be repulsed, and she, in her new humility, had ceased to shrink from the thought of hardness to herself.

"Godfrey asked me to look after him, and I can only try my best," she repeated to herself, as, with a new sort of tact, she waylaid Reuben, and presented him with flowers. Next, she humbly asked permission to look at his books and pictures. And at last, when she had installed herself in the housekeeper's good graces, she took the old cynic's heart by storm, merely by obeying one of the sudden promptings of her heart. Sir Ralph had one of his fainting attacks, and it occurred to Vere that, painful as the wrench might be for her pride, it would be an opportunity to write a pathetic message to her neighbour, and easier than to let one of her necessarily small band of servants plod all the way to Tarringmoor.

Even "Akillis," as the self-made man put it, had a "humane place in his heel." And Reuben had himself just such a spot in his heart, had Godfrey known how to touch it. He not only sent dainties, and port wine supposed to have existed as many years as old Parr, but he took to the *rôle* of benefactor

so heartily that he wrote a letter to Vere, and she answered it in person.

To be sure it was only one step of the ladder which she had decreed that he should mount. But as she reasoned—when she sometimes talked to herself, for want of somebody else to talk to:

“If I can get him up one step of the ladder, it will be easier for him to reach the next. And then, Godfrey—oh! my dear, if you never know *me* as I really am—you will have your father.”

CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN years had passed—more than six since Godfrey left the boarding-house—and spring was coming round again. The same season of the year which witnessed the opening of the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Exhibition was brightening the hedges and ditches with primrose and cowslip, bluebell and violet. Godfrey was busily painting on china some of these products of the fields. His “bread-getting work,” as he was fond of calling it, had little in common with that “transcendent capacity to take pains” which is apt to be more successful than all the doubts and tremors of despondent genius. It was difficult to associate a man whose manners were still so refined with what is vulgarly called “Bohemianism,” and yet the manner in which Godfrey picked up his living might have been fairly called Bohemian.

He was quick to avail himself of the motley advantages provided by the art-revival which had already set in. All was grist available for his unpretentious mill—whether it was an engagement for painting sunflowers on kettle-drum tables, or storks and swallows on gray-green satin to be stretched dado-wise round a West-end boudoir. This was perhaps the best paid work that he had done—the more so that Hunter, the vulture, could not claim any premium on it. And Godfrey, as well as many other workers from hand to mouth, reaped an occasional windfall from the fact that the Englishman—who

had been amused from his childhood with hideous toys, taught his lessons in a hideous school-room, and condemned to eat his dinner sitting on a hideous chair and eating off a hideous plate—was beginning to rise to ecstatic adoration of the somewhat ghastly beauties of Mr. Burne-Jones, and the “Nocturnes” of Mr. Whistler. The Eastern carpets and Japanese knick-knacks which were already being introduced could scarcely be said to add to Godfrey’s profits. But the rushes and Lent lilies which had to be painted on looking-glasses—for the delectation of fair ladies with filleted hair, attired in what they supposed to be Greek costumes—opened to him a fresh source for making money.

Still his sense of failure had become painful—his disillusion remained most trying. He was not a step nearer to making the “name” of which he had spoken to Vere, and he had heard nothing from his father; but, in his desire to free himself from the companionship of Hunter, he had disregarded the doctor’s warning. He had been glad to take anything that offered in the literary way. One day it was a small pencilling for *Judy*—not of course one of the larger cartoons—and on another some society verses to fill a corner in *Vanity Fair*; and there was often the same dreary penny-a-lining for the *Family Enlightener*.

It could scarcely have been possible for him not to have made some sort of living after battling for so many years with the world. He could afford better food, but the continuous strain of overwork, disappointment, and mental anxiety—to say nothing of the want of sufficient nourishment in the past—had weakened his powers of resistance against the inroads of disease. The new lodging which he had chosen was in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road. The locality was squalid, and the rooms ugly. Godfrey’s own little sanctum—which he had adorned with flowers at the windows, and with some of the wood-carving which he was accustomed to sell for brackets, book-slips, and paper-knives—was somewhat better than his surroundings. But he heard enough just then of the jargon which was talked and written of men who called themselves “æsthètes,” to make him sometimes remember that Nero had been an æsthète, and that great art epochs had been periods of cruelty and corruption. He began to be a little sick of the “Art” slang. For behind his lodgings were miserable slums, in which the poorer classes were herded together in a state of degradation bordering on starvation. And he longed for a little more of the robust common-sense, for which the nation was supposed to be renowned, that these people might be helped out of their swinish lives and roused, as by a trumpet-call, to a sense of something more exalted.

All his own nostrums seemed to have failed, for these men did not care to be preached to about "Art," and, till their miserable habitations were pulled down, it seemed to be useless to lecture them about drunkenness, or to teach them to bestir themselves to get out of the mire.

"They are the people, and *I* belong to the people; yet, if I were in their condition, I dare say I should think as they do," he said to himself, disheartened, when Hunter rallied him on the absurdity of his attempts.

Some of Godfrey's friends would have said that it was characteristic of his eccentricity, if they could have been informed that he had chosen this uninviting retreat, fascinated by the refined and motherly face of the woman who presided over it. And, now that his monetary circumstances had improved, he never regretted his choice. For Mrs. Morton was more fortunate than he had been. He was surprised at those whom she managed to discover amongst the very poor—leading noble, thoughtful, and even dignified lives. He began no longer to think of poverty and degradation as if they were convertible terms. Mrs. Morton informed him, after the two became intimate, that some of the people in the "back slums" were by no means so terrible as they had been described. She, at least, had been always amongst them, and had never experienced insult or rebuff. If Godfrey had not already realised the mistake of the exploded idea that riches are necessary to refinement, his new acquaintance with Mrs. Morton would have been enough to make him do so.

"I am tired of being wandering and unsettled. I don't see why I should not settle down here," he said to her, after the first week spent in her house; and she answered him with a smile which he found hard to interpret.

A glimmering of suspicion crossed his mind that she was as well-bred, and nearly as well-read on some subjects, as he was himself. She had a fine, honest face, which looked somewhat old for her years; but when she smiled it was transfigured as with an inward light. It was not till long afterwards that Godfrey heard that his surmises were correct, and that Mrs. Morton—after passing through many more of the shocks of fate than he had ever encountered—had voluntarily selected this spot in her childless widowhood, that she might, as she expressed it, "keep herself without being a burden to her friends;" though she said nothing about her much stronger motive of being able to hold out a helping hand to those who were struggling in the darkness and with the dangers of the place.

"A God-forsaken hole!" one man had called it. But to Mrs. Morton no place was God-forsaken.

The message of the first age of Christianity to the sorrow stricken, jaded, and down-trodden social outcasts had lost none of its import for her—that message of the kingdom had a special meaning still. She never wearied of proclaiming it, losing none of her courage amid the great whirlpool of human beings, the seething multitude of souls among whom she had chosen to cast her lot, and some of whom were besotted with evil ways and with sins of every dye.

It was astonishing how this woman had managed to become a centre of influence to those around her. Every day she sallied forth with her basket—as Godfrey at first supposed, to purchase the beef-steak or chop which now took the place of the potatoes and dripping—but, as he heard afterwards, to minister out of her own pocket to the moaning, despairing, faithless men and women, who seemed to be in ignorance of the ordinary principles which regulate human life.

She was too wise to take upon herself the appearance of instructing these desperate, sullen men, whose children were perishing of disease and hunger, of ignorance and vice, and whose new gospel was the inextinguishable war of classes. She knew that they had an aversion to precepts which seemed to be cut and dried, and to formulas which had become to them too much of a dead letter. But she won them by degrees, and strangely enough without having money to give them, and without sensational excitement. The outstretched hands of those wretched ones, who were some of them crying for bread, might have clutched at her bounty had she been rich, and become dependent on her. Silver and gold she had none, but the revelation of the Master's life had penetrated to the very core of her own being, and she transmitted it to others by living it as well as by gently teaching it. She toiled day and night to get the people around her to be more honest, more cleanly, more industrious, and to let them have some glimpse of those delectable mountains of which she herself in the darkest days never seemed to lose sight.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Morton that when some one spoke to her of "those terrible sceptics which were springing up everywhere like toad-stools," she answered, brightly confident :

"Those are hard words to use. I should think it wiser not to use them. There are doubts which shake faith but cannot destroy it. Who can wonder that they have them?"

"But are you not afraid?"

"Not a bit of it. I believe in regenerating love—in a redemption which is being wrought out by suffering, especially

for the poor. Did not He say, 'Blessed are the poor'? Did not He come to teach them how their very discontent is blessed and to 'turn their sorrow into joy'? But go to them and tell them that it is all a bigot's dream—that there is no Father, no future, and no justice but in the name. Then what you fear will happen. The masses will rise. How will they be able to bear the long toil of their monotonous lives? There will be a struggle for human existence in which the weakest must succumb."

It was wonderful how this woman, no longer standing on the vantage ground of youth, seemed to be a living embodiment of Thekla's epitaph, in a far wider significance :

" We have lived and loved,
We live and love."

It was well for Godfrey that he had taken refuge with her; for returning home one day past a house which had caught fire, whilst the Fire Brigade—of which there was always a smaller attendance in the daytime than at night—had not arrived, he stopped to make inquiries. The people on the ground floor were busily occupied in securing their property, and it was not until after some delay that Godfrey obtained the information that a child and its mother were upstairs and could not be got at.

"Are none of you going to do anything? Do you call yourselves *men*?" he asked, as some of the people who were standing about stolidly shook their heads and muttered something about having to "think o' their hown wives and children."

One of the more intelligent grumbled something more about the inefficiency of the Fire Brigade. But Godfrey did not wait to hear him grumble. He rushed up the wooden stairs, half blinded by the smoke, and succeeded in reaching the second floor. The rooms had been deserted and tongues of fire were darting from them. But the crowd outside was already stirred to sympathetic excitement, and—though no one offered to follow Godfrey in his mad adventure—voices shouted to him from below that the mother and little one were on the third floor. With ready presence of mind he forced himself to face the flames which were issuing from the doors of the rooms, contriving to shut both doors in spite of singed hair and the scorching of skin. Then, hardly conscious of the physical pain in his state of excitement, he dashed up the remaining stairs, never forgetting the sight which met his eyes, of the young mother who sat stupefied with smoke and fear, and looking at him as if her eyes alone belonged to the living. He called to

her, but she did not hear. There was no time to make her understand. Seizing her by one arm and dragging her by mere force down the stairs, he took the baby in the other, and, regardless of its terrified cries, succeeded in saving both. His reappearance was greeted with enthusiastic cheers, the more so that a few minutes afterwards the staircase fell in, and the firemen arrived amid the execrations of the mob, when it was too late for their efforts to be of any avail.

Amid that volley of curses and wailing exclamations—leading to a scuffle with some police who came up at that moment, and valorously took the part of the other officials—Godfrey managed to escape. He returned to his lodgings, ashamed of his sensation of faintness—a nausea which was caused by intolerable pain, a sense of thirst which was hard to bear, and a throbbing of the temples against which he struggled in vain.

Any other lodging-house keeper might have exclaimed at him in horror as he tottered, apparently in a semi-drunken condition, to the steps of her house. But Mrs. Morton's motherly heart went out to him at once. Women who have no direct duties, and are above the drudgery of common life, are apt to become fastidious and fine. But a man's greatest extremity was this good woman's opportunity. She had known that Godfrey was suffering, though the intimacy had hitherto been principally on her side. He had been naturally reserved with her about the circumstances of his life. She knew little of his antecedents, and sometimes wondered sorrowfully if he, with his refined instincts, was aware of the downward path taken by some of the men with whom he consorted. Hunter, the man of trembling limb, of withered brain, and with the pitiable premature decay of old age induced by drink, had been his associate. The partnership puzzled Mrs. Morton. Not that she deplored the premature decay in Hunter; she looked upon it as the Lord's merciful fashion of weaning His self-willed children from love of that which is loathsome and plague-spotted, so that the poison-plants may be eradicated which lead to disease and death.

None of Godfrey's friends came near him at this crisis. For days, and even for weeks, he was in the valley of the shadow, tossing in fever and in delirium.

The fever proved non-infectious, but some of Mrs. Morton's other lodgers thought it necessary to forsake the house. It gave her the more time to attend to the invalid, and she could not help obtaining the key to a good many of the mysteries which had puzzled her, when she listened unwillingly to Godfrey's delirious ravings. But the very ravings reassured her. They convinced her that there were no germs of

meanness or untruthfulness in the soil of this man's heart; and though she did not like the fierce intensity of feeling with which at times he railed against fate, still she considered that, though the over-sensitiveness was unfortunate, it had probably been due to the weakened and morbid state of his bodily health.

Godfrey had a sensation in the intervals of consciousness—in which he seemed to be lying almost within the veil, and was powerless in his state of physical prostration to do more than make a sign to be supplied with some cooling drink—of the brightness of the countenance which was bending over him, as if, more than any other person whom he had ever met, this woman seemed to be standing face to face with the Divine glory. It was the encouraging brightness of this smile which helped him to rally his strength in the most terrible crisis of his illness.

His room seemed to be full of some soft diffused light as his clouded brain cleared at last, and memory—returning to him in slow waves—led him to recognise the fact that the spring sunshine was pouring in through the one window. The blind had been slightly drawn up, and some daffodils, which he did not remember to have purchased, were standing in a glass of water on a table by his side.

"Where am I?" he asked, trying to raise himself in vain, and becoming conscious of his own impotence, as Mrs. Morton smoothed his pillow and answered, with a bright look:

"Where else but in your own room?"

"*My own room!* You are laughing at me. I have made no money—I have nothing to repay you," he muttered, looking anxiously, first in one direction, and then in another.

"Hush, hush! you must not excite yourself—I shall be abundantly repaid," answered the soothing, motherly voice. For this woman, from long habit, was accustomed to think of the sick as if they were her treasures, and of sufferings of soul and body as if she was never to shun them—they were her natural domain.

"I do not understand," he repeated, almost irritably, as soon as she allowed him to speak again; "you ought to turn me out in the streets. I tell you I cannot repay you. Let me die like a dog in the gutter—I can't take advantage of you."

"That is one of your morbid sayings," she answered, as she held to his lips a cup of beef-tea.

"Then you do not think I am going to die?" he questioned a little anxiously, with that dread of seeming cowardly which made him not like to admit how death at the threshold of a life

in which so little had been accomplished seemed to him to mean loss, solitude, retribution.

"You cannot live on air," she answered, good-humouredly. "You tried that experiment too long before you came to live with me. The love of life is a divinely ordered law—but some day when you are stronger I will tell you what I think of what men call death. To me it has nothing to do with ghastly shadows—nor do I see why there should be anything hard in the unconscious dropping of the garment of mortality."

He listened, conscious of not following her with the interest which he might have felt before his dreary period of disillusion.

Years of disappointment and mortification stretched behind him in which it had been hard to believe in the goodness of God. He used to think he believed in it, but of late he was not sure. His mind previous to his illness had been in that sort of state which is commonly called "unsettled," while Mrs. Morton's sure trust resembled the "steadfastness" of the apostles.

"All this sounds eloquent enough," he remarked, a little wearily, "if this sort of thing were true. But you know as well as I do that the majority of people go on now, as they always did, as if they did not believe in it."

"*Do they not?*" she said, laying down her needlework for a minute as if considering, but with nothing of that disconcerted look in her face which he had expected to see. "Then it is better they should speak out. I have had much to do with sick nursing, and I know that when there are certain diseases in the blood it is better that the malady should come to a head. Nature sometimes cures it then without the intervention of the cautery and the knife. But at any rate it is better it should come out. The conflict with unbelief in our days," she added, a few moments afterwards, "is to my mind not at all calculated to make one despair. For when men question anxiously and soberly, and are even desirous of being convinced, one cannot help being very hopeful about the final issue."

He thought he should like to paint her portrait as that of a living embodiment of faith, as she looked at him with shining eyes, and gave him that unexpected answer.

CHAPTER V.

GODFREY'S recovery was retarded by his impatient desire to repay this good Samaritan who had lost so much for his sake.

The food which she continued to purchase for him when he could not even pay his rent seemed to choke him. And, had he been still sufficiently ill to entitle him to enter a hospital, he would have fled from her rather than continue to live at her expense.

At the same time he had but just emerged from one of those heart-shaking crises—when he had seemed to see more than is discerned by mortal eyes—and to have passed through one of those unutterable experiences, of which the invalid returning to life finds it impossible to speak, but which are no doubt vouchsafed to the dying. The spiritual world, on which he had often speculated before, had become an awful reality.

Whilst the mood lasted, nothing could be more congenial than Mrs. Morton's friendship. Godfrey had all his life been denied the natural outlets of tenderness, and the discovery of Mrs. Morton's perfect gentleness as well as the culture which she betrayed by her conversation, and the fact that he could speak to a woman of her age more frankly than to a younger one, did much to cheer him. It made him sometimes reflect that it was a good thing for him to have been brought into connection with life in all its phases, if only that he might know how, under such conditions, a noble woman might live a simple and elevated existence, breathing the invigorating air of the heights, while her feet were hurrying on busy errands of usefulness in the by-ways and paths of the most unlovely flats. The discovery of greatness in the midst of folly, and of nobility in the midst of meanness, would at any time have pleased his artistic instincts.

Yet now when he was recovering from so severe an illness that he seemed to see men through a mist like trees walking ; now when as yet he was unable to shake off the sensation of how the world and all its objects had seemed to be reeling away from him—so that it required an effort of the will to rally the steadiness of his brain—there was much in the unselfish devotion of this motherly woman to gratify that yearning for sympathy—the unutterable and insatiable need of such a man—which had long been pent up in him.

Godfrey, under other circumstances, would have been the first to refuse to be taught, schooled into proprieties, or patted condescendingly on the back by a stranger. But, unconsciously to himself, he was just in that crisis of a man's life when the iron is heated and malleable, and when a few strokes serve to fashion it as a weapon for usefulness or an instrument for evil, and day by day Mrs. Morton was doing more to mould him than he ever afterwards knew.

"I can easily understand that you did not like to have this money showered on you when you did not know how it had been obtained. But I should not have thought it was like you not to keep up some communication with your father. Think how a man of his strong nature must have suffered," she said to him one day, when she had heard his story.

"He cast me off with curses."

"And how would it be if God were to forsake us for ever, when—in our wild passion—we cast off His mercy?"

"He has made no sign."

"You acknowledge there were advertisements. If not actually in his name, you may depend upon it that they were worded with his consent."

Godfrey did not answer.

I have conveyed a wrong impression if I have made my readers fancy that this was a woman who "preached." On the contrary, she was one to shrink from any exhibition of feeling which fell short of action, and had a horror of that incipient hypocrisy which borders on immodesty. The formal and continual introduction of religious emotions and opinions into intercourse with others would have seemed to such an one to be in a measure unreal, and an unnecessary waste of spiritual strength.

But there were times when she could not be put to shame, when it seemed to be necessary for her to speak out, and when she had inspiring thoughts for the harassed, the defamed, and the dejected.

"Well, after all, you could hardly have expected to succeed without credentials, without even being able to make use of your degree, because you had determined to withhold the name which was your own. I don't see, as you say yourself, that you have much to complain of. No fair man will feel being beaten in competition, and I am sure you are not one to trumpet your own slights and injuries," she answered, in a cheery voice.

And so it was that, with the returning strength of convalescence, Godfrey felt unable to take an unhealthy view of

his own trials in life. He felt ashamed of even mentioning them when he heard of how this woman, whose joy so continually surmounted her depression, had been called upon to part with four of her children—one of whom, a son, had lived to be as old as he was himself.

"They have not *really* been taken from me. The world of spirits unseen is as real and, perhaps, more so than the material world—not future, not distant, but present in a sense which we cannot understand. 'We look,' as St. Paul says, 'not at the things which are seen,'" she tried to explain.

If the comforting thought was a mistaken one, it was not Godfrey who would disabuse her of it.

"He *cannot* have given us these strong affections which rivet us to each other to destroy them, and to torture us," she exclaimed, with what seemed to him at first such an astonishing sense of certainty. "He is justice and love. My dear ones are not even separated from me now, and, when I go to them in His good time, we shall know each other again, for He is good, and they live in Him."

It would be difficult to describe the exact time when Godfrey, who, if he did not become imbued with *all* Mrs. Morton's opinions, yet recognised the reality of a religion which did not consist in sudden emotions, nor in aptness in controversy, but in a life the mainsprings of which were hidden from the eyes of men. He did not adopt her way of talking, but he began somehow to feel that she was right in speaking of the relationships between men and women as if they were symbols of relations to a higher Power, and to long, in a conscience-stricken sort of way, after the well-being of his own father. He had heard of religious people—women especially—who supposed Christian love to be so diffusive as not to admit of concentration on the individual. He had had a horror of those who neglected the charities of private life. But Mrs. Morton was a new revelation to him. She believed because she loved; she loved because she believed.

"The effective way of loving the world at large is to begin by intimate affection or friendship for those about us," she told him, with a motherly smile.

And, whether he agreed with her or not, he had no heart to contradict the woman who had borne her own troubles so bravely. It was almost as if she were laughing him out of his. He had never seen her laugh at him, but her cheerful way of taking everything had much the same effect.

"We each of us feel as if our own peculiar burden were the worst," she said, merrily—stitching away at some fancy-work which just then she was thankful to undertake—not having told him about the other lodgers, whom no argument on earth

had been able to convince that nervous fever was not infectious. "The mystery of why such troubles are laid upon us is one which neither you nor I, nor thousands of our fellow-creatures, are likely to be able to solve. But what does it matter? We shall know all about it in such a very short time," she added, in the manner which at first had seemed to him so quaint, as she held up the garment on which she was working. It was some pretty, dark, clinging stuff, and she was embroidering it with irises in different shades of blue.

He could not help thinking how handsome she would look still in such a dress herself, and then decided that she was better as she was, in her rusty black and clean white tippet, and that expression in her face which reminded him of St. Augustine's mother, Monica.

He was turning over the paper, busily searching for advertisements. In his anxiety to be no longer dependent on her, many seemed to him to suit his case which in the old days he would have discarded for fear of discovery.

One met his eye now, appearing in several of the morning papers :

"Wanted, a secretary. A clear handwriting, prompt, business habits, some classical knowledge, some acquaintance with Continental languages, and some aptness at English composition will be required. Preference will be given to applicants who have had experience in journalism, and especially to graduates of Oxford or Cambridge. Work not fatiguing, and salary fair."

Godfrey pondered. Nothing would have been so trying to him as to offer himself for a post for which he felt himself to be incompetent. But here was an appointment which seemed to be made for him—a round hole waiting for the proper ball to fit it. Dozens of more independent appointments, in the Post Office or the Treasury, would have been open to him before through the door of the Civil Service examinations. But these had been more or less public. He had not been afraid of the necessary fag for these things, but he had a terrible fear of discovery.

Looking at Mrs. Morton, busily occupied with her daily work, he wondered where all these scruples had vanished now.

As he answered the advertisement, succinctly and in his clearest handwriting, he thought how little the round, school-boy caligraphy resembled the hurried scribble which he used to write at St. Anne's. But to learn to write clearly and in a larger hand—instead of the Oxford characters, reduced to their tiniest proportions, of which one London editor had facetiously said that he required glasses unusually strong to read them, and must therefore decline Mr. Godfrey's lucubra-

tions—had been one of the new accomplishments which he had obliged himself to cultivate.

In twenty-four hours he received an answer, appointing a certain time for him to go to a house in the neighbourhood of Pall Mall. A man-servant in plain clothes opened the door, and Godfrey was shown into an ante-room, which was filled, as well as the hall, with a crowd of grave, anxious-looking men. He counted thirty-five, and gathered courage from the fact that, though several of them had gentlemanly, intellectual-looking faces, most of them wore clothes more seedy than his own. There was a murmur of talk and some low grumbling among the few who seemed to be acquainted with each other ; while the man-servant—who surely wore felt slippers—ascended noiselessly to the upper room, and came back, after a time, with the information that it would be necessary for his master to speak personally to only six of the thirty-five candidates.

The names were read aloud from a strip of paper with which he had been provided. The first name was "Allen," the second, in alphabetical order, "Godfrey."

Mr. Allen—a half-starved, unprepossessing man, and whose face unmistakably bore the mark of Grub Street—was not long upstairs. Evidently no conclusive answer had been given to him, and Godfrey found himself next, following the servant with catlike tread up the stairs. His own boots were splashed, and grievously old ; his garments—too large for him since the emaciation caused by the fever—fell round him in loose folds, and the hat which he held in his hand was dilapidated. A humorous smile crossed his face as he saw his own figure reflected in numerous looking-glasses as he ascended the stairs.

"Sydney Smith would say this was a meeting of beggars, instead of a meeting of the clergy," he thought, as the figure on one occasion, duplicated and trebled, looked haggardly at him from an arrangement of the mirrors.

In another minute he was being ushered into a back room on the drawing floor. A gentleman's study, furnished with all the new appurtenances—a square Turkey carpet, parquet flooring, dark sage-green walls, with a dado supposed to be of a deeper sage than the walls, a brass fireplace, and fender of the same irreproachable material, a large carved-oak writing-table, and comfortable carved-oak chair.

The room seemed to be so dark that Godfrey, still dazed and weak, could at first but faintly distinguish the figure of a man, standing with his back to him, as the confidential valet disappeared.

In the moment which elapsed before the man turned round, Godfrey was conscious of a strange sensation. The figure was

familiar to him. Surely he had fled from it on more than one occasion, when he had hurried back from the West End and other crowded thoroughfares, thanking his stars that his old friend would be unable to recognise him, and knew nothing of his less frequented haunts. It was but a short time before his illness, when Godfrey—feeling the want of air, and straying, in urgent need of it, through Kensington Gardens—had seen the same man turning away from the path in which the two might have come face to face with each other, and taking a short cut in the direction of the Albert Memorial. Godfrey had resisted the impulse more than once to run after him, and make himself known. His heart had yearned after the man who seemed now to be happy and prosperous, but this very prosperity had made it impossible for him to seem to ask alms of Charlie Lloyd.

There was no escape now. Charlie Lloyd had turned round, and though both men had altered—Godfrey the most of the two—it was impossible for either to escape recognition.

There was no exclamation, as there might have been between women. Both looked at each other—one with startled eyes, and the other with something like triumph. It was an embarrassing moment for both. Neither could help feeling a little confused, being hardly able to pursue the ordinary code of manners, which *may* fit the requirements of ordinary life, but is certainly not equal to such dilemmas.

At the first glance Godfrey saw that Charlie was more shrewd and sharp-eyed than he had been in the past. Time had broadened his figure somewhat prematurely; luxuriously-reared men of moderate height, accustomed to plenty of wine and to a good deal of dining out, being apt to lose the trimness of their build before the less self-indulgent. The second glance showed that though he was quick-witted as ever and ready to pose in becoming characters—a habit which he had contracted in the past, a consequence of being petted—still he was probably as lovable as before.

“Immensely lovable,” Godfrey still thought him, as rallying himself instantly, Mr. Lloyd strode across the room, and grasped his old friend by the hand.

“Not a word,” he said, as he pushed Godfrey with gentle force into an arm-chair, and placed before him a cordial, from a cupboard in an inner room, in the shape of a glass of wine, “not a word till you have taken this.”

Godfrey gently pushed it away.

“I have seen enough of reduced wretches like myself taking that sort of stuff at all hours between meals.”

“You don’t look as if you had had many meals. Even

Pharaoh's lean kine would have put more flesh on your bones," said Charlie, as he retreated to the brass fender, to which he turned his back, and, standing with his legs a little apart, surveyed his old friend meditatively. "Well, my Gracchus, I always said you had what some of the Americans are supposed to call a 'darned lot of queer notions in your brain'—not that any American in real life ever talked like that—but I couldn't have prophesied that such clever notions would have brought you to such a pass."

"I have been ill—any man may be that," answered Godfrey, with a flush on his cheek, and tossing back the fair hair which apparently had run to seed like the rest of him—being longer and curlier than in the "Auld Lang Syne." He added: "You had better let me go. I think it is a pity to spoil an old recollection. I—I should have liked you to keep a green place in the corner of your memory for me. It is weak of me, but if I had known it had been *you* who advertised, I should not have come."

"More than one person can hide his head like an ostrich in the sand," answered Charlie, with his coat-tails still toward the brass fireplace, but surveying Godfrey critically, and ready to produce more wine and even cognac, to the extent of interfering with the liberty of the subject, should that queer pallor increase, "but I simply kept back my name for business purposes, and you—what excuse have you to offer for coolly dropping your family patronymic?"

"It is a pity to brush the bloom of a remembrance off an old friendship," muttered Godfrey, hardly knowing what he said; "you must be ashamed to think how often you were my willing guest at Oxford."

"And I should be glad enough to be your guest just now, if it were possible, old fellow! No, never talk of an ideal being destroyed because a friend is poor and in difficulties," he retorted, with a flash of boyish enthusiasm. "It is you who have treated *us* badly, never answering our other advertisements."

"I did not see them. It must have been when I was ill, or too hard at work to look at advertisements. When I mentioned my real name to her, my landlady informed me of the fact of which I was ignorant. You must not over-estimate my passion for self-sacrifice."

"How was it you did not pursue the clue when your landlady told you?"

"The advertisement was not from my father."

"It was from friends who cared for you."

"You mean that because I am a pauper, if I apply to my friends, they will be ready with their stray shillings. You

do not understand. I might come to sweep a crossing, but as to alms I would accept none of them."

"But surely your father——?"

Godfrey felt it his duty to explain. The upshot was that for the first time Charlie Lloyd thoroughly understood how absolute the breach had been between Godfrey and Reuben.

He became accustomed to the answering of the subdued voice, and realised how this man had been over red-hot ploughshares, and had drunk of the dregs of the cup of humiliation in the seven years' struggle through which he had passed.

"Ah! I see," he answered, after a pause, "you wanted, without exactly knowing it, to reverse in your own case the private selfishness which led to your father's determination to rise. You were actuated by a benevolent desire for the welfare of the human race; but—it was impracticable—quite Utopian. Well, what have you done for the working-man?"

"I have been one myself."

"*You* one of the great unwashed?"

"The name has no meaning. I have supported myself by wood-carving at times, and found it as lucrative as ill-paid painting. I took my work to the shops. Why—there is all the difference between an honest British workman and a slave of Sesostriis."

It was a whimsical sort of consolation, so like the old Godfrey. His old friend smiled to himself as he listened to it.

"It would be a pity if, after all, you regretted it. That would spoil the romance," he said, speaking a little drily. "Now *I*—I never cared to be heroic; but I should not, if I were one, be a reluctant hero."

"But you have always tried to do your duty?"

"Every honest man does that."

Mr. Lloyd laughed again as he uttered this platitude; this time a little harshly.

"Ah!" he added, "you have been battered about in the world; but, after all, I know more about it than you do."

"I was not in a position to learn much. The struggle was too great for the necessities of life."

"It is better to fail sometimes in trying to do what is right."

It sounded again like a copy-book maxim when Charlie had uttered it. He was not given to moralising, and was rather amused when Godfrey took it seriously, and answered, quietly:

"Yes, I believe there are successful men whose hearts ache more bitterly than those of the unsuccessful."

"Is all this struggling after one's ideal worth while?" asked the other, lightly.

"Not perhaps if this were the *only* life," answered his old friend, with a far-away look which staggered Charlie, and made him fear for a moment that it would scarcely do to engage this man as secretary, since it might bring him in contact with a funeral. "And yet I don't know," said Godfrey, correcting himself. "Even if it were so, it would be infinitely better always to aim high, and do one's best for the race."

"Well, you must have the courage of your opinions. But you must understand that, as my secretary, they have nothing to do with *mine*," answered Charlie, with a little more of the high-born Mæcenæ, who thinks he can patronise a bread-getter, about him than, a few minutes before, Godfrey had thought possible.

"My opinions on some points are not so settled as they used to be. As a man grows older, he sees both sides of a subject better," answered Sellwood, quietly.

He was used to wet blankets and wasted opportunities. Disappointment had been his daily bread, and he began to think that this interview would turn out as others had done.

But Charlie Lloyd seemed to regret the sharpness of this speech as soon as he had uttered it. He rang the bell before he spoke again, and, when the man-servant appeared, gave orders.

"Bring coffee and biscuits. This gentleman does not take wine before his dinner. And tell the other men downstairs, with my compliments, that I will let them know again if I have any need of them."

The man brought the coffee, eyeing Godfrey's long hair and his mis-fitting, shabby coat with a look of the keenest disapproval.

"Well—you belonged to the reddest of Red Republicans, if I remember rightly, at St. Anne's, though you were too shy to talk yourself into fame at the Union. I—I know I talked a lot of nonsense, and had the intellectual measles as bad as any one," said Mr. Lloyd, when the valet had left, with a genial laugh, a return of his happy, confident manner, and that comfortable security as to the fact that everybody was going to like him which had made the world from his boyhood more or less of a fairy-tale to him.

"I don't think I was *quite* so bad as that, though I did not see so clearly as I do now that, if the cause of order is to be deprived of its present powerful auxiliaries, the selfish instincts

of mankind may come to the front somewhat disagreeably," answered Godfrey, with an echo of the laugh which was good to hear.

"You didn't talk so didactically in the old days."

"No; if one said a thing then, one had to be striking as well as amusing. Do you remember talking once in my room of 'those soft undercurrents of sound which grease the wheels of time'? And you were angry with me for wanting to abolish the House of Lords as a 'grotesque anachronism.'" And both men laughed heartily again. They could not help being tickled at the recollection of the charming insolence, the naïve assurance, and the fresh pertinacity of the youthful convictions of the young orators at the Union. "Dreadful young Radicals!" they had called each other in badinage; but more than half the startling opinions which had been broached by them had been taken up for the sake of argument.

"It was good practice. I know I was bad enough; but then I had no mother to shock. Well, I shouldn't be honest if I did not confess to you that I soon found there were questions of more importance than vague schemes of philanthropy to be settled amongst the working men, whom I tried to think of as my mates."

Charlie's laugh rang out again as it used to do in the old days.

"So far as I remember, we arraigned principles and not things," he said, by way of turning off the subject. "At any rate, we thought we went to Oxford to *study*, and not to gain prizes. If I remember rightly, my studies were principally in the way of breakfast-parties and human nature; and yours—you had a fair smattering of classical knowledge and a first-rate acquaintance with English literature—that is the very thing I am looking for now. By-the-bye, your frankly-expressed opinions were greatly exaggerated at Tarringmoor."

"And you have been at Tarringmoor?" asked Godfrey, flushing again, the change of complexion betokening, as his keen-eyed new employer thought, either some unusually strong emotion or great delicacy of health. "Did you see——"

"I saw more than one person who was very charming," answered Charlie, pointedly, as he pulled out his watch and looked at the time. "Do you know we had better get to business? I never like to discuss friends whom we have in common."

The pucker on his brow did not escape the notice of Godfrey, whose transient colour quickly faded, leaving him very pallid.

"All is fair," thought the other man, "in love and war. The poor dear fellow has behaved like an idiot, and when the

girl ceases to pity him, he will quietly be let down from his pedestal."

He was glad for many reasons of the meeting, for he prided himself on not letting love overbalance his friendship. But, now that the start would be a fair one between them, he could scarcely help thinking, as he glanced at Godfrey's stooping figure and pallid face, that the innings would be certain to be all on his side.

"To return to our muttons, as the French put it. I remember you were a smart writer, a great reader in the old days," he said, encouragingly, "and that you were apt to bother your brains about more things than were good for you. Forgive me—I was a little careless just now—I ought not to have alluded to the past. But I think it fair to tell you that your father is much improved. Miss Rashleigh is a witch; no one knows how, but she has quite won his heart. The old cottages are pulled down, and new comfortable dwellings have been put up. She goes to him and reads to him as she used to do to her uncle."

Did Godfrey hear aright? The buzz in his ears, and sparks which seemed to come before his eyes, illuminating a sort of darkness, prevented him from hearing much, as Charlie proceeded to give an account of his own affairs.

"Was it possible that Charlie Lloyd could mean such a thing as *that*?" he asked, as he tried to put away the thought about Vere.

He dimly heard that Mr. Lloyd's elder brother had lived for some time a sort of death-in-life, that it could be only a question of time as to when the paralytic sufferer would be released from his log-like life, and that meanwhile on the second brother devolved all the management of the estate.

"One can scarcely desire him to live, and yet, you see, I may some day be a member of that effete institution—the House of Lords," said Charlie, with difficulty suppressing another of his hearty laughs. "There are peers who have been nobodies, but who worked hard when they were young. There are some who have earned rank, and others who have inherited it. But I shall be a sort of piebald horse—a peer who has positively inherited his rank, and yet has known what it is to earn his bread."

"I dare say you will make a very calm, sensible, jovial old gentleman," Godfrey would have said, if he had uttered his thoughts aloud. As it was, he muttered, with a little *gaucherie*, that "he looked upon the House of Lords as a most important breakwater."

"Nothing like the march of Time for taking the priggishness out of people. Well, if you undertake this post, I shall

look to you to help me with my correspondence and my literary work. I have a good deal of that. I produce an article in the rough, and expect it to be polished for me, and put into form. You see, when one is expected to say something, and is not particularly fertile in ideas oneself—a little stale, if I may put it so—it is a decided advantage to have a secretary who is more productive—well, perhaps that's not the right way of putting it—more practised at that sort of thing."

"And does the world talk about your articles?" asked Godfrey, facing a fresh conscientious difficulty, one which he knew had to be evaded by most hack-writers in London.

"No—it's only intimate friends who know much about it. I wait to get the right knack before confessing my identity. I want to get influence—there is no influence like that of journalism—to have a newspaper of one's own; a project which I have talked of more than once—is a means of impressing one's opinions on tens of thousands of the people."

CHAPTER VI.

IN less than a week Godfrey was hard at work as the secretary of his old friend. It seemed to the astonished Charles that he worked tremendously, neglecting nothing which industry could accomplish, shirking not the smallest item. That this man of shrinking nerve, who was not ashamed to proclaim himself the son of a labourer, should not only know more about politics than Mr. Lloyd himself, but should be able to say it still in the most fitting words, after living so long among the people, seemed sometimes to be a little marvellous.

Charlie had had a secret suspicion that the "penny-a-lining" must have destroyed the refinement of his secretary's style. But, when he brought what he called "his own ideas" in the rough to Godfrey over-night, he was pretty certain to receive by the morrow's noon a composition which no more resembled the old rags that he had hastily thrown together than the delicate white paper which had passed through the last process of the paper-mill resembles the pulp. Godfrey winced when

his new employer praised him. What could Charlie know of the number of those manuscripts which had vanished during the last few years as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up, and which were possibly reposing still in the lowest depths of editors' waste-baskets?

He felt as if the bloom had been rubbed off all his earlier aspirations, and could only be thankful that, before he knew Mrs. Morton, he had sedulously kept away from the purlieus of some more recognised Bohemians, who did their best to help each other by boozing in public-houses between Temple Bar and Ludgate Hill, recognising the old axiom that water is best, especially when it is plentifully flavoured with brandy. Not even to Charlie could he tell of the time when the problem of how to live had been very difficult to him, of when his watch had just found its way to the pawnbroker's, and a magnificent diamond ring, the gift of his father, had quickly followed its example.

His new work seemed to him light. It consisted of but five hours a day, three in the morning, and two in the afternoon. By that time Charlie's accounts, as well as his literary matters, and the correspondence which had been more bothering still, were all comfortably disposed of. Indeed, on some days the work was a sinecure, and on those occasions Charlie would ensconce himself in dressing-gown and slippers in his secretary's room, and show himself heartily disposed for a chat.

"You used to take such an interest in class struggles," he said to him, on one occasion. "I was half afraid that I should be engaging a demagogue for a secretary; but now you seem to have a new dislike of offending other men's prejudices."

"I am no longer likely ever to be a capitalist," answered Godfrey, "nor am I so certain that I know all about a great many questions with which I once thought myself well acquainted."

"But your brother, as you call him, the working-man?"

"I think of him as much as ever. Only I remember the saying, to which even Diderot could assent, that there is a worse evil for society than the loss of liberty, and that is the loss of God."

Both men had much to keep them grave. The brother of the one remained in a critical state, and the other was still cut off from news of his father, if the flying visits of Mr. Lloyd did not supply him with occasional information. After one of these visits, Charlie startled him by the information that Sir Ralph was dead, and that Reuben had behaved like "a brick," allowing the daughter of the bankrupt man undisputed possession of the house and park.

"Ah, I doubt if you ever did justice to that father of yours. Harsh nerves without which a man could never have lived such a wearing life—three days of such knocking about would have jarred most men into idiocy—lead to harsh words; but, bless you! he never meant them. He is prose itself, he had not the nature to comprehend you—but his feelings are strong as iron; he'll have his grip on you still."

Godfrey was silent.

But when a year had passed, and spring was coming again, his life, which was now a tolerably happy one and evenly-balanced, was disturbed by the following exclamation:

"Who do you think has been in town? I did not tell him *you* were here. But if you do your duty there'll be a lot for you to see about. Mr. Sellwood has no more idea of conducting an election on a decent, new-fashioned basis than Johnnie Gilpin had of riding."

"*My father!*—what, Mr. Sellwood?" repeated Godfrey, in bewilderment, and suspecting Charlie of being again engaged in a plot.

"Yes, it's not altogether a bad notion," said Charlie, considering with apparent attention the pattern on his plate. (For the men now generally lunched together, and Charlie was kindness personified to his secretary.)

Godfrey sat staring at him. He did not take the notion in.

"Come," continued his patron, a little impatiently, "you're nearly thirty years old—or is it thirty-one? You're not behind-hand in your politics—you wouldn't suit me, if you were. And you will quite understand that, as there is a talk of a coming election, some of the Tarringmoor folk, who are more go-ahead than the rest of them, would like to have the place freed from the thralldom of Toryism—not that your father knew whether he was a Tory or not," and here Charlie began to laugh.

"I told him that as a rule when candidates mean to solicit the suffrages of a constituency it is generally necessary to toss up and make up their minds beforehand whether they shall wear the orange or the blue. But come, this will give him an opportunity for settling some of your burning questions. He'll fall into everything that you suggest," said the future Lord Newderry, stifling his laughter.

"I don't understand," began Godfrey.

"Oh, wait, I am coming to it—all in good time. You know your father is immensely improved. I have the profoundest respect for him—I assure you I have. But I will

confess that I was just a little taken aback when Mrs. Austin wrote at the request of Miss Rashleigh to make the startling announcement that Mr. Sellwood meant to go into Parliament. It seems that he has been invited to come forward by the local Liberal Association. But I doubt if he knows the difference between one party or the other. Bearing that in mind, I wrote back to her to tell him that it was immensely good of him, but that I should object to his being kept on his legs for the amusement of the roughs, and that I had too much respect for his constitution to like to see him deprived of his natural sleep."

"Well?"

"Well, you may depend upon it he is not the man, when he has made up his mind, to shilly-shally, or let the grass grow under his feet. And it seems that a Mr. Tatham, whose family has owned the seat for two generations back, has offended some of the Tarringmoor folk by seeming to count on a perpetuity of tenure, and they are anxious to get rid of the present incumbent—or cumberer of the ground. All this is an opportunity which your father will not let slip. Down comes Mr. Sellwood by the next train, with a persistent idea that an abundance of spare cash put out to usury will be sure to weigh heavily in his favour. Now the comfort is he is not of feeble fibre. But he has got wrong notions into his head about five-pound notes, and flags which are illegal, except, I suppose, in churches—he'll want drums next—to say nothing of tea and sweetmeats."

"Had we not better go on with what we are doing? I don't know how all this talk will help my father," asked Godfrey again, pallid as at his first interview with Lloyd.

"I'm coming to it as fast as my breath will let me. Well, when your father shows himself in town, his object is *this*. He says he takes the liberty of coming to me because he thinks I might know some gentleman of experience who will manage his affairs as a candidate. He says he wishes to do the thing handsomely, and therefore, whoever will come down as his friend will be magnificently paid, I make no doubt, but for certain reasons I advised him not to state the sum."

"Thank you," said Godfrey, quietly—his eyes were cast down, and his hands had a firm grasp of the table.

"Now, you know he is already inviting burgesses wholesale to dine with him. He is much struck by the notion that the thing is to be done by money, and—to be honest with you—if he is to keep within prohibited limits, it is only his own son who will dare to hint at the existence of a scruple."

There was a glass of water on the table. Godfrey raised it and put it to his lips. Then he asked, with apparent indifference:

"And you think that it is—a lady—who is tempting him to this?"

"Yes, she has reason to be grateful to him, he has been generous to her. But it is like skating on thin ice for Miss Rashleigh to try to interfere with him. She says it will be a good thing to turn his thoughts. He has never been the same man since you left him. But you see a woman does not appreciate as well as we do the danger of corrupting the electors."

"What do you advise me to do?"

"Accept this engagement—you will be beholden to him for nothing—you can take up your quarters in another house if it please you. But go and take care of him. It is your manifest duty. I had nobody else to recommend but you. And you know there is no occasion to put *you* through your facings."

There was again a pause.

"A man who can write short articles or paragraphs for the papers seems to him especially desirable."

"But I could never puff him in my paragraphs."

"Well, you'll put it all straight. Explain that to him yourself. It's no good beating about the bush. I'll write and tell him that you'll go down."

"And you?" said Godfrey, raising his eyes.

"Oh, *I*. I expect to be summoned to poor Greville any day. Then all my affairs will be different."

"Ah! you are throwing your bait again with the certainty that the fish will rise—you have been considering how you can patch up the quarrel between myself and my father, skilfully humouring the pride of both. It is good of you, but you must give me a few hours to think," answered the other, as he rose to his feet.

He wanted to be alone, and to talk to Mrs. Morton.





Part VII.

I am so tired,
If I would comfort me, I know not how,
For I have seen thee, lad, as I desired,
And I have nothing left to long for now.
We two, that had so many things to say,
So many hopes to render clear,
And they are all gone after thee, my dear.

Jean Ingelow.

If thou art rich, thou'rt poor,
For when in age, whose back with ingots bound,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And Death unloadeth thee.

Shakespeare.

CHAPTER I.

IT was on one of the last mornings in March, 1880, when the sun was shining after a slight shower, the cocks crowing, and the little birds with wet wings beginning to sing, that Godfrey—sparing a few minutes from the absorbing business for which he had returned to Tarringmoor—found his way to the old gate of Rashleigh Park. Godfrey, who had not seen the venerable trees and the ancient greensward for years, felt as if the antiquity of the place gave it an added beauty. He thought of the stuffy smell of Piccadilly, Pall Mall, and even the Park with a contempt which would have been ungracious but a few days before, as he breathed in the fresh ozone and odour of moist earth.

The forsaken aspect of the place seemed to invest it with the deeper serenity of Nature. He was in a humour to be pleased. Coquettish April was heralding her approach, and

just touching with her lightest tints of green the branches of an antique avenue of trees, the arches of which looked like Gothic vaults. The "wandering voice" of the cuckoo, redoubling its initial note, was not heard as yet, but any day, if the wind were to shift, it might come ringing merrily and sharply through the air, and gushes of wild-bird music seemed to tell every now and then of the exquisite joy of the coming spring.

"Can any one fail to be glad on such a morning?" Godfrey asked himself, in his new delight. Reconciled as he was to his father, through the skilful ruse of that good friend Charlie Lloyd (who would have given him credit for such a stroke of diplomacy?), and with every prospect of success in the election—which was rapidly to take place before there was time for the Toringmoor people to rake up stories against Reuben—could there be anything more delightful than this relief from imprisonment in a great city? With life no longer a war waged against the great tyrant Necessity, who crushes our ideals and lays his chilly hands on our enthusiasms, and with his father's opinions now more in unison with his own—owing, as he sometimes thought, to that suffering which had seemed at the time to be almost hopeless in its uses—Godfrey felt as if his highest aspirations might after all be satisfied, and was elated by the hope that not only might he be able in some simple, unambitious, and unobtrusive fashion to realise his dream of helping hundreds of his fellows in their moral and physical destitution, but that pure, domestic happiness might after all be his.

He felt as if he had gone through a little wholesome depression from which he had risen emboldened and not weakened in love for the brotherhood. Flowers there might be in London in abundance, raised by skilful market-gardeners to smile in uncongenial scenes. But they had not the poetry of *these* flowers. He remembered where they all grew in summer—myosotis, moneywort, and golden-rod. He never recollected to have seen so many wild flowers in the fields—lifting up their radiant heads unassailed by the scythe of the mower—as there were at Rashleigh in the month of June. And just at present no one seemed to disturb primroses, Lent lilies, marsh marigolds, and wood anemones. Perhaps it was because no one was rich enough to disturb them. He smiled to himself.

"How the utilitarian tastes of most rich people would lead them to neglect nothing which would deprive this place of its picturesqueness and grandeur. Those magnificent old chestnuts would be trimmed till they had lost the graceful droop of the lower branches, and the upward spring of the higher ones."

A few steps further on he hesitated.

"I'm making a fool of myself, and can scarcely spare the time. But I can't for the life of me keep away from the house."

A man passed him on his way from the private garden. Was it Godfrey's fancy that he stared at him blankly?

"If she is not alone—if there should be any one else with her?" he asked himself, with another sort of shock.

The clock from the turret of the old stable struck nine. A purple shadow passed over the distant view of the moor. He glanced at it, with the river like a silver ribbon meandering, and thought—with that sort of pang which he had always found it hard to prevent—of that part of the old Rashleigh grounds which his father had appropriated, but which Vere loved so tenderly. There the stream which fed the river, on a moist day like this, would be bounding in capricious leaps from stone to stone, from boulder to boulder, singing its own little song of triumph.

He wished for a moment that he had appointed the interview there, and then pulled himself up.

"No ; it would have been taking unfair advantage of her. There are sentimental associations connected with the place. It is best for both of us to forget them."

He was near the house by this time, and could see the windows garlanded by the passion flower, always more or less in leaf. He could distinguish the brilliant colour of clumps of yellow jonquil, and tulips thickly blooming in the flower-beds, and even the undulation of a red curtain at one of the windows.

His sensitive shyness about women—a shyness which he had not yet conquered, though he had often reproached himself for losing an opportunity by excessive bashfulness—caused him instinctively to draw back, and stand screened for a few moments by a bank of evergreens. For at that instant a girl, very slender in figure, and of rather less than middle height, in a light-gray dress with a black sash, and a large hat with black feathers and ribbons, came down the steps of the house. She was wearing a heavy, fur-lined mantle, from the folds of which she seemed to be desirous to escape. For directly she had tripped past the immediate vicinity of the windows, she tore off both cloak and hat, and stood revealed in a puffed and gathered artistic costume, displaying the perfect lines of the tiny figure, and crowned with black, curly hair, on which the sunlight played, lighting up the neat little head, with its double rows of fringe crisped, twisted, or tortured into shapes which might have rivalled the locks of the Medusa, only in this case they were so diminutive. The "back hair," as our

grandmothers used to call it, had been clipped away. The lowered eyelids had long, black lashes sweeping the cheek, the complexion was dark, but clear and healthy, the outline of the mouth delicate, but a little pouting.

She walked slowly, as if she found something melancholy in the place. Her hands hung down in a meditative attitude, which was evidently unusual with her. In another moment she began to sing. She had a voice, but it was almost drowned by the warbling of the birds. She was approaching the turn of the road where she would come upon Godfrey. Without more ceremony he advanced, holding out both his hands in cordial greeting.

It was prosaic, but this little woman was terribly afraid of live stock, pigs, or cows. She had even been known to run away from a turkey, and the rural habits of the people in this part of the country—with the poverty which caused many fences to be unmended in this neglected park—led her to associate a footstep with something that might be alarming. It was an illogical fear; but when a girl is given to tremors of this sort it is rarely that she thinks of anything logical. And the Lilliputian feet were already trampling wildly on the flower-beds—where it did not seem to Godfrey that they could inflict any great amount of mischief—when she saw the stranger following her, raising his hat.

“Don’t you know me—little Dorothy?” he asked, with some emotion in his voice.

The girl receded a few steps. There was an expression of offended dignity on the face which made him hasten to remedy his mistake.

“Will you forgive me for calling you by your Christian name?”

She examined him without answering, mentally cataloguing the advantages and disadvantages of the figure before her. A man still young, with a complexion which told of delicacy, expressive features, and a few lines on the forehead—of light build and somewhat thin. The whole physique was unusual, especially as the colouring was so fair, and the hair almost flaxen. She did not remember ever seeing any one exactly like him before, and perhaps he was the “something which might happen.” She hated the life which she had been forced to lead since her return to Rashleigh Park, and was always waiting for the “something.”

“My name is Dorothea Henrietta—a most abominable name; but in Paris they called me Henriette,” she answered, with a look of humour lurking in the flexible corners of her mouth.

“I prefer Dorothy to Henriette,” he said, smiling. “You

used to be Dot when you were my little sister—do you remember it at all?”

She stood silent, her eyes wide open with surprise.

The years, for the first time in his experience, seemed to thrust themselves into disagreeable prominence, as he stood waiting for her answer.

“*Que voulez-vous?*” she said, at last, with a shrug. And he wished they had not sent her to a French school.

“Let us talk English—you are eighteen?”

“And four months.”

He smiled.

“You were ten years old when I saw you last. I used to carry you on my shoulder. You went to sleep in my arms.”

It was the prettiest little expression which came into the astonished velvety eyes now, the most charming rose-tint on the smooth young cheek, and she tapped one tiny foot impatiently on the gravel. He felt so old, and had lost so many illusions during those dreary years in London, that he could not help smiling again, and thinking of the enchanted land of Oberon and Titania. Did Shakespeare plan his “*Midsummer Night’s Dream*” after an experience of ugly lodgings, or London coffee-taverns? Did it save him from melancholy? So little was known about Shakespeare that all theories were possible.

Henriette woke him from his reverie. The little flute-like voice was saying:

“But *you*—you were not like this then.”

“Nevertheless, I am the same man. Has your cousin heard of my return? I thought of taking her by surprise. Has she—has she—ever—mentioned—me to you?”

It was a difficult question to get out, for, though Godfrey had conquered his shyness, he had awkward recollections about the past.

Henriette’s varying face, reflecting—small as it was—every passing change like a landscape under our varying English sky, had spoken for her before she said, in a puzzled moment in which she could think of no ready answer:

“Why should she mention you? She is not young enough to talk about things. Besides, you know——”

She stopped, and rushes of colour suddenly flooded both face and neck.

“Well, you see, when a girl is fixed in one groove, and when things have become a little out of date and old-fashioned, and when one is obliged to grind down servants—well, not exactly that, perhaps, but she works as hard as any of them herself,” explained Dot, lapsing suddenly from the indefinite to

the definite—"you can't wonder if her ideas get a little severe."

The perplexed expression of the girl's face made him feel sorry for her.

"It is a pity," he ventured, "if you are not happy together."

"Oh, we are *so* different! I am always trying to keep quiet like her, and not to grumble. She talks to me, you know, about the misfortunes which bloom as thickly as daisies for a repining mind—there, look at them; we have enough in all conscience on our lawn" (he could not help noticing how deftly and expressively she used her hands); "but ah-h" (it was something of a French interjection), "it is *triste* here—I have *migraine* half the time. She calls it retirement—I call it stagnation."

"After all, I prefer the daisies on the lawn to closely-shaven baldness," answered Godfrey, with an impulse to help.

He could not have told how or why, but a sadness had crept into his voice, the spring morning had clouded over, the birds had ceased to sing. The *naïveté* of these childish confidences, the freshness of the little unoccupied heart, would have been charming enough in themselves, if they had not suggested a vague sort of shadow. Was it possible that solitude and misfortune could have petrified a character like Vere's? He had a horror of women who were hard.

"But your cousin?" he began, intending some sort of rehabilitation of his ideal.

"Oh, don't tell her of my nonsense. She prides herself on avoiding exaggeration of sentiment; she does not like me to read novels which excite my sensibility."

It did not escape Godfrey's notice that she said "sensibility" like a Frenchwoman, and that there was just a touch of the shrew in the manner in which the little forehead was puckered up, and the pretty foot stamped the ground.

"There are novels and novels," he suggested, gravely, "just as there are women and women."

"Yes," she answered, her conscience smiting her a little as she remembered the demoralising sensational romances, which she herself in her better moments heartily despised, but which she had smuggled into the house in their cheap paper covers, adorned with ghastly pictures, awful to look at. "I don't mean to say it's Vere's fault—she's without a fault, perfection, and she's made the maids a good deal like her—'careful training,' don't they call it? They are all too good here," she added, with a sigh; "it would be nice to do something awfully wicked for a change."

"You think goodness monotonous?"

"A little dull and flat—don't you sometimes?"

"You'd like to vary it by a mountain of some sort?"

"No—now you're laughing at me."

This spontaneous young creature, who had so many new ideas and so many unsatisfied longings, was a new revelation to Godfrey.

"Not laughing at you at all," he answered, as he looked a little wistfully towards the house. "I ought to have heard all this before; but I might as well have been at the Antipodes, so little have I heard of old friends."

There was a cloud on his brow. The conversation, which had taken but two or three minutes, had somehow damped the buoyancy of his spirits.

Her eye instantly grew bright and keen. He was ashamed of feeling that he shrank from their inspection—he who was no longer a boy, and ought to be able to endure their inquisition.

She recognised for the first time that he was visibly agitated, and tried not to appear surprised. She thought it odd that he took her hand, and did not look her in the face.

His own hand trembled, and she had no longer any desire to babble her silly little confidences.

"Come, I mustn't keep you talking," she said; "I will go and call Vere."

And, with no further warning, she fled from him, half terrified.

"It can't be always *now*—surely something is going to happen. I couldn't live long in a dry way like this," she repeated to herself, as she flew rapidly over the lawn.

CHAPTER II.

VERE found herself forced to act a part for one of the first times in her life when, a few minutes afterwards, the little head poked itself in at the door.

The effort to keep disappointment and anxiety out of her voice made it almost sharp as she said:

"Oh! dear child, is it not understood between us that I am not to see visitors in business hours?"

The elder girl liked intervals of solitude, perhaps because she had accustomed herself to them. It seemed to her she had no possible right to consume any inordinate amount of other people's time. And, since her uncle's death, she had used herself often to sit alone in the study or to superintend in the kitchen.

"It is thanks to Mr. Sellwood's charity," she sometimes said to herself, "that I am able to keep to a little corner of God's earth, and do my best to make it green and bright."

She would not have accepted the charity for herself, but she reminded herself that Henriette was of a delicate nature, suffering from all sorts of minor things which, to people of stronger nerves, could not be called by the name of ills. It was a misfortune, an hysterical malady. Vere had a slight contempt for it which she never allowed herself to show.

"We two are alone," she had said to her cousin, on the first day when she had welcomed her from Paris. "We must try to make each other happy, and help one another."

She had heard that Godfrey was in the village, but had not spoken of it to Henriette. To do so, she knew from sad experience, would be to have her private affairs blazoned about the place. She had been certain, as she said to herself, that Godfrey would return some day, and that he would find she had been faithful to the trust which he had confided to her.

"He's a wretched cynic," people had been accustomed to say of Reuben; "he talks as if he did not believe in anything in heaven or earth."

But she had been able to answer, quietly and proudly:

"He believes in a good deal more than he lets people think; he is no cynic at all. What, for instance, should *we* have done without him?"

The constant thought of the trust which had been confided to her, and the care which she had had to give to two somewhat morose old men had made her seem a little older than her years. She had led a home-spun, monotonous sort of life, with passions suspended in the solitude which had been enforced. She had feared even to trust herself to the power of the imagination, or to allow herself to picture the first meeting after a separation of years. Sometimes, in spite of this, she had caught herself rehearsing the very words she and Godfrey would be likely to say to each other.

But alas for the difference between fancy and reality! When, wearied with her account-books, Vere had got up to look through the window—a minute or two before her cousin ran in to call her—had she not seen this apparition of her dreams?—

the man who had been expected for eight long years—aged and paled, just as she had pictured him? No—could it be he?—standing in a nonchalant attitude, listening to the confidences of the talkative Henriette? Did her imagination mislead her?

In the solitude in which no one saw her, she forgot for a few moments the ink which had soiled her fingers, the fair hair which was unusually rough, and the rusty crape of her somewhat neglected black dress, shining in folds where it had been turned. She made no effort to prepare herself, only endeavouring to control herself when she received Henriette's message, and advancing with the dignity which he remembered in the days of old.

"Godfrey!" she said, meeting him with her hands outstretched, and standing at the door in the full light of the ruthless sun, which just then had emerged with brightness from a cloud, and was searching every line and every deficiency in her face.

Had not Sir Ralph foreseen years before that the glory of Vere's colouring was likely to be evanescent, and that the features were not regular enough to satisfy a sculptor? Well—what of that? In the heat and burden of the day the flowers are not as bright as in the early dew of the morning. There was nothing in her countenance to make her shrink from loving scrutiny. She was aware, though not in any morbid way, of the changes in it. But as she stood bareheaded, with premature lines on her fair, broad brow, and the sun shining down on her flaxen head, there was no sign that her heart was throbbing violently, except an added pallor, which was strangely unbecoming.

It was, somehow, not exactly the meeting which the man had imaged to himself. Do not such meetings almost always seem to disappoint us after our imaginings? The glamour seemed for the moment to have vanished, as if a cold hand were clutching his heart, and the cold were extending in some strange way to his whole body.

Were little Henriette's insinuations real? Could it be possible that the woman who had once refused him—partly from pride and the fear of humiliation—had become in the course of years cautious and disdainful? Could he offer himself again to one who was ready to repel advances, and who, if he married her, might prove an iceberg? Vere, pale with emotion, with her lips colourless and trembling, dress neglected, and hair rough, scarcely realised his anticipations; whilst all the time there was something unexpected in his gaze which arrested her, and stifled the cry of her yearning heart. Etiquette forbade her to question him about his

past, whilst it did not seem natural for him to address her, as he had intended, with words of tenderness, thanking her for the change which she had effected in his father, and asking her to be the mistress of his hearth and the realisation of his ideal.

Priding herself on her presence of mind, and with one of those quick deductions which women are always ready to draw, she recognised, or thought she recognised, a change of feeling in him, and talked, if not as rapidly as Henriette, with as much readiness.

"When the election is over, you must give yourself a rest," she said. "Mr. Sellwood can't do without you now."

"Any poor man would be glad of the engagement. I am promised a bonus, if he succeeds or not."

"Why keep up that pretext?"

"What pretext?"

"That you are a poor man."

"I never wish to be rich."

"Is there not a little defiance in that?"

"I do not know how the money was made."

"You should trust your father. It is scarcely likely that he will wish to surrender the project of his life. You are quite young still. You should accept thankfully the goods with which the gods provide you."

She was thinking, as usual, principally of others, though she felt ruffled and uneasy. This sudden arrival had shaken her, and deprived her of her boasted strength. She could not tell that he was chafing at the veil of womanly reserve in which, as usual, she had shrouded herself, and that—intimidated and discouraged from the fear of placing her in a fresh dilemma—he was losing a second opportunity of speaking out. For the mere pleasure of seeing him again and talking to him was beginning to thaw the frigidity, which had been only apparent. A sort of happiness, which seemed to bless rather than to expect to be blessed, stole over her, and was a great beautifier.

"You joke! I am on the shady side of thirty," he exclaimed.

A smile wreathed itself over her face.

"No, I don't. Some of us grow old quickly. Others are like Rip Van Winkle."

"I am very much honoured, but I am quite unable to accept the compliment."

With a quick sense of delicacy he had detected her consciousness of the change in herself, and would have liked to have told her how *he* had suffered—how it was as though his soul had been bruised, and he felt the bruises all over.

"She is like a glacier," he had said to himself at first.

But now he saw the Raffaelesque resignation in the face which he had too easily fancied to be severe and denunciatory.

"Was the child right?" he had asked himself, in terror a moment before, alarmed at the look of blank stoniness in the dear face. But now the old expression had returned with the self-forgetful smile, and he hated himself for the momentary suspicion. It did not make matters better that she seemed already to take it for granted that he had been fascinated by her little cousin.

"Is she not pretty?" she asked, when Dot left them. "I fear it seems rather a hard, colourless life for her here. Her father's death came at last somewhat unexpectedly, but quite calmly. He had been so used to lingering illness. And, had it not been for the goodness of *your* father, it would have been hard for us to live."

Godfrey did not answer. He was thinking of how terrible it would have been if either of these women had been condemned to suffer from actual privation, and he felt as if his father could not have acted otherwise.

"You know there is no male heir, and nothing for any one to inherit," she continued, with a smile which showed that she could be still her frank, bright-spirited self. "Your father could have turned us out."

"Impossible—he speaks of how much he owes you."

"We were both much alone, and we helped each other."

"He does nothing but sing your praises."

"There was a time when he seemed to hate me."

A recollection rose before her as she uttered the words of the lonely, desolate man, eating his own heart out with bitterness and regret, who was said to be dangerously ill soon after his son had left him. He had refused to allow any one but the housekeeper to nurse him, and when Mrs. Rose was worn out with her task and with the surliness of her master, Vere had begged her to allow her to come and help her. She had taken Reuben by surprise when he, waking from a nap one day, had discovered her sitting by his side, laden with flowers, which she had brought to propitiate him, and looking as if she had brought the sunshine with her. She left him no time to swear at her, for she began singing softly directly the sick man woke, and at first he was inclined to wonder if his disbelief in apparitions was incorrect after all. But when she explained to him with tears that she was sorry to have been the cause of his misfortune, and asked if she might read to him, as she was accustomed to read to her uncle, he gave an unwilling consent. All this returned to her memory, but she did not speak of it.

She drew the conversation again to Henriette, and seemed

rather pleased than otherwise that Godfrey had already made acquaintance with her.

"It is a little hard that she should be condemned to this hermit-like existence," she said. "You must talk to her and help to develop her. I know how little she has to amuse her here, and it has been duller than usual since my uncle's death. But if one could get fresh interests for her!"

"I asked her if she recollected how I used to carry her in my arms. But it would be absurd to suppose that she could remember such a thing through all these years."

"I have no doubt she remembers," she answered, with an effort at composure which accounted for the coldness of her voice, and which succeeded so well that she could meet the man's earnest gaze without flinching.

To all appearance she was neither depressed nor ill at ease, and, when he asked if she—as well as Henriette—never chanced to find it dull, she said quickly, in the tone of a person who had determined to be cheerful, and wished at the same time to cut inquiries short:

"I am sure it must be my own fault if I am not contented."

She had kept her arms close to her sides, as if she would oblige herself to keep from gesture, and her hands were trembling with the restraint which she had put on herself in such a way that she became aware of it as soon as he had gone.

She had left the French gesticulation to Henriette, but it was only afterwards that she knew how at the first she had spoken calmly and even coldly, and had stood before him like a statue.

"I must have seemed unsympathetic," she thought, plunging her face and neck into a basin of cold water a few minutes afterwards, that she might rally all her self-command. "It was a pity, but I would rather seem unsympathetic than appear to be the victim of an unrequited passion."

She caught sight of her face in the glass, and for once sat down before it counting the wrinkles which were slowly coming, the lines, and the marks of care.

"I am not thirty yet; but my uncle looked older than he was before he died, I remember. Some women grow older sooner than others, and happiness might have made me younger," she thought, with something like a sigh, as, for the first time, she noted with disapproval that, even when she had brushed her hair smoothly, there was a geometrical correctness about the old-fashioned bands, and a precision in the stern cut of her dress, including the neatness of the collar, which was likely to be somewhat irritating to the artist mind.

It dawned upon her, as she rested her chin on her hand,

and listened to the water flowing in a brooklet near her window, hastening to join the stream in the wilderness—where already marsh marigold and wild Lent lilies were blooming—that it would be possible for her to wear her hair in a curly fringe like Henriette, and to let her neck peep from soft ruffling destitute of hard lines. Had she not passed eight years in waiting, and nobody had heard her murmur? Then, with the child-like generosity with which she had ever been ready to surrender the best which life could give her to others, she thought how much more suitable it would be that Godfrey should marry Sir Ralph's daughter. Her conscience, that pitiless repeater of hard truths, whispered :

“Is she not younger and prettier than you, and more at an age when luxuries are required? Did you not give him great cause of offence? Did you not speak to him in a way which no man would be likely to forget, and will you deck yourself out to allure him now? And would it be possible for you to supply Henriette with sashes and lace, and yet spend the money on yourself? Are you not the weaker of the two to think of such a thing? Let the girl have her chance.”

CHAPTER III.

GODFREY was so occupied with his father's affairs that he was able to spare but a short time on the following day to present himself again at the Park. He was anxious for another private interview with Henriette—not so much because he had been disenchanted by her revelations, as because a quiet dread had risen up in his mind which seemed to him to account for the coldness of his reception.

“Her cousin will tell me; she volunteers everything, and it will be better for me to know,” he said to himself.

It was earlier than before when he ventured into the Park, rather before nine o'clock. He had important work at ten.

Henriette was already in the garden, scissors in hand, gathering some flowers.

"How early you are!"

She made a little grimace.

"You have no curfew-bell—you others—ten o'clock at night—we keep humdrum hours."

"I have been thinking of what you said yesterday."

She drew herself up.

"I don't know whether I ought to have said all that—I have never known a mother—it is true—but I talk too fast."

The *naïveté* of the confession was like the rest of her character. For some cause or other, she was on her guard.

"It was you who talked of your cousin's future. You made me think——"

He stopped before he could finish the sentence; for men do not like to question women. And, though it had struck him that Vere had already given some sort of pledge to his friend in the days when Charlie's prospects had been little more promising than his own—an explanation which seemed to account for Lloyd's unwillingness to talk on the subject—it was not possible to approach the subject.

"Common-sense is uninteresting, and so is the dull lichen which dull lives are supposed to contract, the damp moss forcing itself over the very roots of life, and threatening to strangle them," he thought, a little hopelessly, as he looked at the moss-grown trees around him, and ventured to ask:

"Does your cousin ever weary of this place as you do?"

Henriette laughed convulsively.

"How can she weary, when it is 'duty,' 'duty' with her all the time?" she queried in her turn, with one of her Parisian shrugs. "Why, she has no time to sit still and weep. What is it the poet said?

'Men must work, and women must weep.'"

"Kingsley only introduced that bit of false sentiment into a ballad. He was the last man to speak of it as true," he said, quietly.

"Well, it is 'work,' or whatever you call it, which seems to haunt her all day, as if she were haunted by a sin."

"I might have known that she was likely to prefer self-immolation to vulgar ambition," he said to himself. Then aloud, "But she has friends?"

"Ah yes"—a little archly. "Who told you? There is a story to that effect. They say that her pride was wounded by some one when she was older than I am now, and that that prevents her from marrying—though they do say she has a friend. I know, if I had one, I would make him come here, and cheer us up a bit. Women stagnate without men. I suppose she writes to him sometimes; at least, Mrs. Austin writes."

She had said little—nothing at all, as she declared to herself, when she afterwards thought of it, but there was a subtle divination in the man's mind which made him guess more.

"I hope I have not hurt you," cried Henriette, surprised into naturalness by the concentrated look on the thin, pale face.

"Oh no—there is nothing wrong. I am not easily hurt," answered Godfrey, sharply awakened from his reverie, and puzzling her more than ever by his answer.

The sound of voices reached Vere, who was busied in the kitchen, and she hastened out in curiosity as to election news.

She had suffered during the night, and suffering is no beautifier. More than ever Godfrey deplored the fact that the radiant possibilities about her seemed to have been checked. If she were engaged to his prosperous patron, why should the shadow of self-sacrifice seem to have fallen on her? How could he guess that the look which he thought strange on her face was the look of a woman who had determined to face the consequences of her own mistake, and who was not one to succumb hopelessly to circumstances?

She met him with a smile, which it cost her much to wear, but which at the moment seemed to prove her indifference to him. She wore a large apron over her dress, a bunch of solemn-looking keys by her side, and seemed to have been giving out the grocery stores. As fate would have it, a diversion was created just as she stepped out from the flagged floor of the kitchen to welcome the couple, whom she had again seen in the distance, but whom she had not liked to interrupt.

Some cocks and hens had found their way into the scullery, and the maids were busily engaged in driving them out. Henriette was again convulsed with laughter, and Godfrey found it hard not to follow her example. Vere smiled.

"We are very primitive, because we are poor. You laugh at me," she said, in a low voice. "I think our ancestors would laugh. I make myself ridiculous with this housekeeping."

"Oh, it is cruel to drive them about—I can't bear to see creatures suffer," cried Henriette, recovering from her laughter.

Vere looked at her in silence, knowing well that this was a little piece of false sentimentality, but not caring to expose her cousin's love of acting. Unconsciously the slight hardness crept again into her voice.

"Dramatic heroines would not be able to make simple pastry," she said, with a little laugh; "but—I must send you all away," and she displayed her flour-covered arms.

"Ah, you see it is her element, home and domestic pursuits, and all that—they are not my element at all."

A few minutes afterwards Vere joined the two who were strolling round the house, and they found themselves suddenly in front of the older part of the castle, which had still a proud air, as if vain of its antique beauty.

"You have nothing like it in *your* grounds," said Henriette, a little defiantly.

"No, it is so good of Mr. Sellwood to let us stay here," answered Vere, in the low tones which seemed to have become habitual to her.

"I cannot thank you enough for the change in him; I find it out more day by day."

"I only drew out what was there already, concealed from most people, but he has plenty of good feeling and much ability."

"With *you* must rest the merit of the discovery."

"I believe in all my fellow-creatures," she answered, as she opened the door of her own private sitting-room, and said, looking at Henriette as well as at Godfrey, "You can come in here as frequently as you please—you can amuse yourselves as you like. No one will interrupt you, and I am quiet myself. Those are my uncle's as well as my father's books. Choose when this election-time is over. It is not a bad library," she added, when Godfrey did not answer.

It was the retreat of a woman of culture. Fragments of old tapestry, pieces of old armour, and furniture of old oak saved from the ruins of the castle, flowers, birds, shells, china, all were here, besides a harp and a piano.

As she sat down on one of the low chairs (for they had breakfasted already, and Godfrey was hastening back to his father), he could not help recalling Reuben's words of the preceding night.

"She is no longer quite as fresh as in her early girlhood, but she is one of the best and most charming women I know."

"How much she and I would have had in common—what a marriage it would have been to have added to one's *growth*!" Godfrey thought to himself with a pang as he feared it was not to be.

The fine simplicity which he had always admired in her character had not been at all impaired by time, and a nature which could rise above the melancholy caused by endurance and solitude, remaining always bright and helpful when others might have failed, was as much as ever to his taste. But, as far as he knew, she was not free to accept him now. Every moment when he was with her he blamed himself for being intrusive, reminding himself that he must not allow himself to think of her.

With Godfrey, when she next met him, she was perfectly

friendly and unembarrassed, shaking off her awkwardness of the first meeting, and allowing him to see—now that she was no longer unnerved or distraught—the true nobility and beauty of her character. It did not seem to be possible to mix up thoughts of jealousy with such a woman. Pettinesses, meanesses, and small irritations about trifles seemed to have been cast out of her nature. Once more he was inclined to say of her that she could be as self-possessed as any man without the weaknesses of an exacting nature.

Torrington was now distracted with all the excitement of the election. And Vere—Conservative by family tradition and education, yet feeling as if she knew little more about some of the political questions at stake than if she were a baby in arms—remained at home as much as possible. It was Henriette who was constantly out in the neighbourhood, shaking hands genially with Godfrey's friends, and forgetful of the interests of her father's old ally—whom she readily enough classified as a "horrid fogey"—wishing Reuben Sellwood a pleasant and successful time of it. Henriette even undertook to do a little private canvassing amongst the cottagers in the neighbourhood, and appealed to the working-men, taking their hands and looking at them with earnest eyes, which made their hearts beat faster, for she at least had no troublesome conscientious scruples to worry her. At home she was dull and restless, would not see guests, would not read her usual novels, would not go out in the spring sunshine, which was tempting and bright, unless it were to walk to Torrington, would not sing her little songs, was somewhat cross, and more than a little absent.

Vere seldom put any constraint on the movements of her cousin, not supposing that there were lions prowling about in that quiet neighbourhood ready to devour young girls. Yet she felt a little weighed down with responsibility about Henriette just then, and knew that when the roads were crowded with strange men it was not right for the girl to go about alone without an escort. She watched Henriette all the more anxiously when her offer to accompany her was somewhat irritably refused.

Meanwhile the election for Torrington seemed as if it would pass off good-temperedly. The local Liberal Association had invited Reuben to come forward, as likely to be a successful candidate. It was thought probable that he would outbid the Tory where the Tory looked upon himself as chiefly strong, namely, in landed influence, and with this he had to be taught to combine Liberal views. He would thus have all the advantages of a Conservative and none of the usual disadvantages of the unknown Liberal nominees of the Reform

Club, who are most often sent to contest boroughs like Tarringmoor.

But Reuben's education in English politics was as yet defective, and, counting on this deficiency, another Liberal had come forward likewise for the borough, and—till Godfrey's introduction on the scene—had appeared likely to divide the honours with Reuben Sellwood. It was a little trying to the latter to find that the introduction of the Ballot Act had diminished the exciting character of the proceedings. Rotten eggs, flour, dead cats and dogs to be showered on the hapless orator of the hustings would have inspired Reuben with a Brutus-like courage. While the suggestion that "free and independent electors" could not be liberally "treated," or that an unmanly "polling-booth" had to be devised for the secret recording of the votes of weak-kneed voters—who had to creep in like folks who were "hard-up" and wanted to pawn their belongings—seemed to him contemptible and disgusting.

"One would think that a British citizen would be proud to exercise his privileges as a freeman," said Reuben, drawing himself up, in something like his old spirits, after his first meeting with his son.

And as days passed on and the peace of the Tarringmoor people was interfered with by nothing approaching a serious disturbance, and when the few acts of violence which are almost inevitable in such contests were reprobated by all parties, it is doubtful if Reuben did not secretly sigh after the good old times when differences of electoral opinion were apt to be settled by hard knocks instead of immaterial argument. In those "good old times" whole boroughs had been bought and sold, and one or two had actually been disposed of by the "order of the Court of Chancery."

Alas for the "change 'twixt then and now!" as some one quoted from Coleridge to Reuben, who thought the quotation a good one and repeated it bravely.

In Tarringmoor during these few days there was little difference to be noted from the ordinary stagnation, except that a number of people, who generally cared little for politics, had suddenly become mightily enthusiastic. A few of the cynics who regarded an election of this sort as the machinery for a vast chattering-machine, skilfully wound up for special occasions, coveted the deafness of Beethoven, and wished that they also had a cellar into which they could escape from the cackling of unmelodious and loquacious disputants.

In no more providential way could Godfrey have been reconciled to his father. Reuben was happier than he had ever been since his son had left him; smiling to himself and building castles in the air. In fact, he was too happy and too

delighted with the clever plan by which Charlie Lloyd had introduced him again to the man of whom he was secretly still as proud as ever—and whom he insisted on calling his “boy”—to be willing to recall the old subjects of dispute.

Not only were the subjects of dispute really “by-gones,” but in many cases they had actually disappeared—melted into thin air, by the skilful interposition of the gracious woman whose tact had already been exercised upon the uncertain temper of her own disappointed uncle.

“Miss Rashleigh’s grandfather paid me a cruel trick, but times were different then. She is extraordinarily capable—very efficient,” remarked Reuben to his wondering son, on the second day after they met.

By this single remark Godfrey saw how he was changed. For never did college coach, high-school teacher, or school-board mistress labour harder at the newest theories of education than Vere had worked during these eight years in developing all that was promising in the character of this hitherto uncultivated man.

She had not only asked leave to read to him as she read to her uncle, but by degrees had introduced him to most of the good English writers. She had so cleverly corrected his errors of speech by repeating after him what he said—as if she attached especial importance to his opinions—and repeating it often in a different way, that he had unconsciously adopted the language of better educated people. There was no longer anything to jeer at in Reuben, either in his reticence or his roughness of speech. And though he could not be called an accomplished man of the world, of good birth and recognised antecedents; though he might possibly have been blackballed at some of the more select of the clubs in London, on the whole his promptness, his energy, and his air of decision invested him with an importance which could not be claimed by better born men.

Already he was thinking of his prospective house in town, and stringing together a few glib phrases, in which he no longer made grammatical blunders, when Charlie sent to his assistance the literary gentleman who had promised to render him assistance.

To say that Reuben was astonished when the dog-cart which had been sent to meet the train returned, bringing with it the one being whom he really loved on earth, would be to overstate the fact.

For Charles had prepared him for the surprise. The scheme had not only been devised by his skilful brain, but Reuben had rehearsed for it. In reality he could hardly speak when he saw his “boy”—his emotions were so overpowering

that he had some thoughts of opening a vein, according to the old methods of medical practice, that he might avoid the risk of epilepsy or something worse.

But he had so learnt to control his features that Madame Rachel's victim, when she stepped into the witness box—with her face apparently covered with plaster of Paris, painted pink and white with every appearance of juvenility—did not more skilfully disguise her original self than this apparently matter-of-fact man who attempted to receive his son without an appearance of sentimentality.

Godfrey, who had likewise come prepared, was the more surprised of the two.

Of literature, when they had parted last, with the exception of Shakespeare, Reuben had known nothing; but of politics and public affairs he still knew very little. The explanation was that Miss Rashleigh knew little of these matters herself.

"You must write your address at once," was the first advice which the son ventured to give him, and which he acted upon immediately.

The two men sat up during the small hours of the night, before both of them were satisfied with this composition.

"Gentlemen," dictated Reuben, "the dissolution of this Parliament gives to you and the country at large the opportunity of deciding whether the present Government has not made too many mistakes, and missed too many opportunities of fulfilling its duties, to be again entrusted with the reins of power."

"Reads well for an opening sentence—don't it?" observed Reuben, with a colloquialism of which Vere had not been able to cure him. "Now we must have something about 'peace' and 'plenty,'—'benefits to the working-classes,'—your old hobby—eh—and all the rest of it?"

"Well, I think it is hardly necessary to begin with a hit at the other party—on the whole, I should not do it," was the answer of his son.

"Gentlemen," redictated Reuben, tearing up his other paper, "Her Majesty's Government having advised the Queen to dissolve Parliament, it becomes my duty to solicit—eh, what next? A hit at the income tax, Afghan and Zulu wars, and all the rest of it——"

Godfrey's head was whirling. His father's native shrewdness was as usual not at fault. Yet with all his keenness he had not discovered that this first meeting after an interval of years was too trying to his son to enable him to think with his usual clearness.

Godfrey tore up the second copy and commenced a simpler form :

"I beg to offer myself as a candidate for the honour of election as one of your representatives in Parliament. Convinced that the welfare of the people will be best favoured by Liberal principles of legislation and government——"

Here he stayed his hand. Speaking figuratively he could not get on his legs at all. What in the name of truth and common-sense *were* his father's opinions about the people?

The drops of moisture stood on his forehead as he remembered the time when he had told this very father that he refused to live on money unjustly wrung from the poor, and when he had said himself :

"If I ever enter Parliament, it will be to devote myself to the cause of the people."

It was possible that he had judged hardly. If he had to address any man eight years younger than himself under similar circumstances now, he would say to him :

"Wait and think. You are not expected to settle everything in this world. There are many problems which must remain for years unsolved."

He acknowledged to himself that, after living for years among them, he knew little enough how to remedy all the troubles and difficulties of those who are called the "lower classes."

Reuben, who had had no peep into these innermost arcana, what did he—what *could* he possibly know of the manners and customs of people whom till lately he had despised? Born and bred among them, he knew as little about them now as if they were the aborigines of distant lands—say Fijian Islanders.

Reuben seemed to guess what was passing in his son's mind, for, with a sudden want of self-control, he cried, with a little return of the old freedom of speech and want of culture :

"Go at it—stick at nothing. Promise that I'll amend the Land Laws and extend household suffrage."

"There is no occasion to be in a hurry," said Godfrey, a little huskily. "Would it do to have the people saying that this was a line assumed for the hustings which you objected to before?"

"I thought we'd decided on the Liberal policy, and that anything would go down with them," answered Reuben. "Let off plenty of fireworks. It'll do them good."

"Hereditary instincts," thought his son, balancing the pen, and thinking how to answer, "have a trick of reasserting themselves when one thinks they have been stifled.—What I mean is," he said, speaking slowly and trying to explain to his father, "that a man should get into the House of Commons simply on his own merits. His opinions and his ways of

dealing with certain questions should have been formed beforehand, or they are apt to be useless."

Reuben stared.

"I'm told that the Liberals as a rule are longest in office of the two, and money is no object with me. I made money for you and you look down on it. Now, look you here, I am ready to expend £5,000 in hard cash on the expenses of this election, and to make promises which'll cost me twice as much, when I've set my mind on a thing."

"But it is equally certain that you must not lay yourself open to proceedings by the expenditure of that money," thought Godfrey.

He kept the thought to himself, just as he likewise kept to himself a growing desire to draw a sharp distinction between the programme of the Liberal party and the new-fangled, semi-continental political philosophy which he had heard constantly discussed among the class of people with whom he had associated in London. The important social questions of the day weighed more deeply with him than ever, but he had never been accustomed to treat them as mere watchwords of political strife; they had ever been questions with him to be received with profound earnestness, and to be approached on the side of self-sacrifice, yet he was no longer sure that they necessitated the redistribution of wealth.

How should he so word the printed address, and afterwards suggest material for Reuben's speech, as to preserve the just mean?

To secure for those who cultivated land the due results of their industry, to make rentals more equal and taxation fair, were still highly-cherished projects of his. But he had become more careful lest he should paint abuses in an odious light. He had lived to feel that it was one thing to be a Radical orator rousing emotions and covetous desires which might lead to acts of lawlessness, and another to be a conscientious philanthropist endeavouring to undo the consequences of admitted wrongs. He disliked argumentative tactics which might be unfair, and, though he rejoiced in the fact that his father was now doing all that he could to help the tenants on his estate, he thought it unfortunate that Reuben should have chosen this special time to remit twenty-five per cent. off the rents of the tenants.

As day after day passed by—and the days were but few which preceded the Tarringmoor election—he winced at the discovery of more than one flaw in the armour of respect with which he tried to invest his father.

Reuben's audacity and singularity surprised and alarmed him. He was as a man smarting under the sense of being

foiled in the one project of his life—that of having a stupendous fortune, and founding a family in the person of his son—and comparatively reckless as to what he did with his money. The residue would be left to Godfrey, whose indifference to the fact was more than ever vexatious.

Godfrey had another vexation just then, but, after all, it was the way of the world. When he had been in London, the salesmen had found out that they did not need his work. Now, since it had become known who he was, letters followed him in abundance, and it soon appeared that he could have as much well-paid employment, artistic or literary, as he pleased. Meanwhile it still occasionally happened that his renewed intercourse with his father was like walking over dangerous places. He had to be very wary of his steps. And Reuben's way of looking at things was so puzzling to him that to help his father at all was much like attempting to clear a jungle to which it seemed in vain to apply the axe.

Godfrey was as little desirous as ever of inheriting enormous wealth which he feared might have been acquired by tyranny and injustice, and which he looked upon as a precipitate from the labour of the many.

And Reuben was still reticent as to the manner in which he had acquired money. Whether or not he regretted the passionate explanation of his early personal wrongs and the vehement denunciation of the elder Rashleighs could not be known. But he spoke with unusual tenderness of Vere, and seemed to have put away from him his bitter cravings after vengeance. In fact, the eight years had done much to transform the man. Though Godfrey was sometimes bewildered with a sense of shame when he saw Reuben for the first time cracking jokes with the mothers of dirty children,—stroking the hair of the little ones with his own hands, which had somehow become in the course of years well-formed and white—and though he objected to so many burgesses being asked to dine, it was impossible to speak judicially to his father on the subject.

Anything seemed to him better than that the old feeling of estrangement should crop up between them.

"Sellwood has made his book, and he will win," said some of the Tarringmoor people. "He'll never open his lips when once he's in the House, but that speech of his was not a bad one."

Reuben was fond of quoting the saying, "The French cooks would be the best in the world, if they had got any butcher's meat." And with the assistance of Godfrey, whom he called his French cook, he had managed to put together a good deal of knowledge which was actually to the point.

The cheers and counter-cheers, the varied sounds which were expressive of animation or interest furnished the *vis* which was needed for the man's oratorical powers, who, if he had been reticent before, was rather proud than shy.

The cheers were to him as the breath of his nostrils, and in the excitement of the moment Reuben let out the fact that he had been a Tarringmoor boy, setting out from his native town at the age of ten to earn a sparse livelihood. The imprudence of the admission did not occur to him till afterwards, when he was comforted by recollecting that the Tarringmoor parish registers might be searched in vain for the name of an infant baptized by the cognomen which he had adopted. But, after the statement of this fact, Reuben's speech was a success. His anecdotes, his illustrations—homely though they might be—and his invective—a weapon with which he knew how to deal—touched in every case a responsive chord. Not a word of his fell flat, and, if his rhetoric was a little too vivacious, it was admitted even by his opponents that he had at least fire and vigour; while the cultivated speech of his more powerful antagonist, given in a more or less melancholy manner, bore about as much resemblance to the speech of the other candidate as pale moonlight might bear to midday heat.

Vere's words, "You will have no cause to be ashamed of him. You can't tell how he has improved," occurred to Godfrey's memory, as he took his father's arm, and walked back with him to encounter the little ovation which greeted them in the town.

"*You* did a lot for me, but Shakespeare did the most," said Reuben, not a little pleased with himself, and quite forgetful that he had neglected to keep to the line of partial neutrality dictated by the younger man.

Godfrey's lofty scrupulosity would probably never have carried his father through the election, but now he began to think that, in spite of the appearance of the younger and more sprightly Liberal, Reuben might win the seat from the Conservative, who considered himself to be a fixture.

"You were always fond of Shakespeare," he said, encouragingly; "you used to spend hours reading him. Why, one ought, after a time, to give out light almost in the dark, when one has been steeped in such an atmosphere."

CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE Vere's growing anxiety respecting her cousin, and her perplexity and alarm at not being able to control the turn which matters were taking, prevented her from hearing much about the doings at Tarringmoor. Knowing and bitterly regretting as she did that her judgments, her opinions, and tastes on many subjects seemed to the younger girl to be a little severe, she was the less inclined to exert authority over her.

"Do you understand," one of the old ladies in the neighbourhood had said to her, half angrily, when she met her, "that you ought absolutely to forbid that child going about by herself? If there is no one to control her, you should have left her at school."

"She returned before my uncle's death."

"The fact is, you two girls should not reside by yourselves."

"I feel quite old enough for anything," answered Vere, with her accustomed smile. "We have our very old housekeeper, besides."

"Past her work, as you know—it is *you*, to all intents and purposes, who are the housekeeper. And what with the dairy, and some farming—excuse me, my dear, you bury yourself too much—you do not know what is going on outside your own place."

"Henriette always walks with the maid—one of the maids—I have always managed it since I heard the place was so full. Would you have her cling to me like a shadow?"

"Humph!" said the old lady, with a grunt of disapproval, "she might as well walk with her puppy-dog."

She was apparently in the right, and Vere in the wrong. But unless the latter could have summoned one of her distant female relatives—who were all of them already distracted with curiosity, and to whom she must have confided her own impecunious state, and the fact that she and her cousin owed much to Reuben Sellwood—there was really nothing to be done.

"It is a good thing," she thought, "that I have no brother to inherit a title coupled with starvation. With *our* lives the shame, as my poor uncle felt it to be, will end."

She remembered that it had been Sir Ralph's dying wish that she and his little "Dot" should continue to live in the

old place as before, and that the gossip should be hushed up as Reuben's unexpected generosity had suggested. It was natural that the neighbours should be a good deal exercised on the subject, but there was something in Vere's manner which kept them from openly questioning her on her affairs.

"Could I turn a bright-eyed gazelle into a quiet, domestic pussy-cat? Could I force a girl to study when study is hateful to her? One wouldn't place roast beef before a toothless infant," thought Vere, a little out of patience at the interference.

It was a worry to her to be forced to admit that, though she had made up her mind to be a sort of protector to the girl, and was ten years her senior, she had not yet succeeded in being able to understand her.

There were possible depths in her young cousin's character which seemed at first sight to be incongruous with her wilfulness and frivolity. Unreserved and eager for sympathy, troubled by the mysterious unknown and the gray dulness of her present life, Henriette — when she first returned to England — had shed tears for imaginary woes for which perhaps a mother might have petted her and pitied her. But Vere, who, in spite of the secret troubles of her own life, had taken up her own work again with increased activity — and who was ready to attribute this so-called "hysteria" to the boarding-school education, which had been unfortunate in its results — had shrugged her shoulders a little, and deplored the affectation. Latterly — perhaps too late — she had taken herself to task for a mistake, and had attempted to re-establish confidence between herself and the easily complaining creature, whose frail organisation possibly accounted for her discontent. Vere fancied that she could read the poor little heart like an open book, and was only likely to err now in the opposite respect, that of crediting an excitable school-girl with undue feeling.

This afternoon she had returned from visiting a few of the cottagers, having vainly attempted to remonstrate with some of the men who were hanging idly about their doors, neglecting their work, with the stereotyped excuse that it was "lection-time." It was a beautiful April day, and as she passed through the village she could not help admiring the fields studded with buttercups, the daisies with hearts of gold, and the fruit-trees in their spring toilettes, whose serious and practical dress would so quickly succeed their wedding garments.

It was not strange that Godfrey should be standing in their garden in talk with Henriette. It was at an interval when he might easily escape, and Vere had almost expected to see him.

In a place like the old park, which seemed to have fallen asleep, with nobody coming and nobody going, his visits were cheering. And the park was beginning to look beautiful in its spring attire, while she had a full recollection of Godfrey's artistic enthusiasm—a recollection so strong that she seemed again to hear the ripple of the waters, and the swaying and sighing of the branches of the fir-trees as the wind tossed them about one gusty day, years ago, in the wilderness. But something in Godfrey's attitude was strange, though she told herself that she had expected *that* as well. Not quite so soon, perhaps, for she had her old liking and admiration for the man; and though she accused herself of having treated him badly, she did not like to think he was "light of love." He was bending over Henriette, apparently giving her some flower, or—could it be?—a letter. And it seemed as if their hands lingered together. *He*, at least, to Vere's fancy, looked as if he still felt the touch of the cool, smooth brown fingers. So it had come—sooner than Vere expected—and she at least had the courage which had ever stood her in good stead, even when her physical strength began to sink to its lowest.

"The earth is waking from its wintry sleep, but all things are dead asleep that cared for *me*. God give me strength to care for *them*," she said to herself, as she dragged her limbs on mechanically, conscious of nothing just then but the necessity for preserving her presence of mind.

Godfrey had never seen her look so majestic. The old black cashmere dress which she was wearing fell round her like the folds of drapery on a statue. A hot colour burnt on her cheeks, whilst the transparent shadow of a black bonnet which she was wearing, with lace strings contrasting with the fairness of her hair, showed off to advantage the skin which had once been so delicate, and which, in spite of its sunburn, was still fair.

"She has not altered nearly so much as I thought at first, and what matters if she *had* altered, if she is—as I now feel sure—still as noble in character?" he was thinking as she advanced, and, in a voice which was again a trifle abrupt from the effort which she put on herself, asked:

"Shall I go away?" And then, with a laugh which seemed to him a little ill-timed: "Oh, I thought perhaps that less publicity was desired."

"We were talking about what every one talks about—my father's affairs. The worst of a man placing himself in this position is that people rake up everything they can against him," Godfrey answered, hoping to put her at her ease, and wondering that she should again have assumed the reserve and timidity of her country ways; for he was sure that this abrupt-

ness was veiled embarrassment, the more so when, turning to Henriette, she asked :

"Have you changed your shoes? The grass is damp to-day."

"Oh, it is so like her to be always fidgeting about my health. You have no idea what an old nurse she has grown in her care of me," laughed the girl, with colour which came to her own cheek in a rosy wave.

"Our neighbours say that I do not take enough care of you."

"Our neighbours—I don't think any of them are worth knowing—present company always excepted," answered Henriette, with another uneasy laugh, and then, with a shrug, concluding her speech. "How dull it is! And yet she has managed to live here all these years. What shall I do when this election is over?" She nodded to Godfrey, and bounded across the lawn to please her cousin by changing the thin shoes, which were certainly wet.

Vere was following, but Godfrey placed himself before her.

"No," he said pleadingly, "you must not pass me. The strange way in which you have evaded being with me alone——"

"I have evaded—nothing—I am not—aware of it. And just now I am really anxious about my cousin."

There was a slight hesitation in her voice—so trifling that no one would have detected it who was not used to it.

"But—your refusal to listen to me."

"Have I refused to listen to anything?—is it about the election? I—really forget."

And she looked at him with a tranquillity so admirably acted that he was stopped in his speech.

"You are still very proud," he said, speaking as if to himself. "Why should you not be? You have ancestors dating from——"

She winced as if a stone had been thrown at her. It was the first sign of excited feeling she had shown.

"Oh, leave alone my ancestors! What good have they ever done me? It was not of my dead ancestors I was speaking, but of real flesh and blood. Dot has always been delicate, and I cannot get her to take care. Any illness, any grief, however slight—I mean a real grief—might kill that child."

He bowed a little bewildered, and she hastened into the house, leaning her head for one moment against the mantel-piece in her own little sanctum. The marble against which she leant her forehead seemed burning, and she could not see as plainly as usual. It seemed useless to try to do her best, for she no longer held the clue which might help her to dis-

entangle the maze. Her own case was clear enough. Women, God help them, go on loving men long after men have nothing to offer them in place of the old flame but its ashes. She believed that Godfrey might still offer *that* to her, but it would be to his interest that she should elude his offer. There was intellectual sympathy between them—in some matters—but she had wearied of controversy, and did not care for party politics any more than for controversial debates about religion.

But intellect, as she knew, was worth nothing compared with the simple attractions of the heart.

"Does he imagine," she thought to herself, "that the blood which flows in my veins is cold, and that I have no longing for passionate love? I have always behaved in such a way that he *must* think so. And would *I* care, if I were a man, to fall back upon a *reasonable* life with a woman who was merely dry and clever?"

Her pitiless good sense seemed to make her understand that she was not nearly so well suited to be the companion of a man so near her own age, as Henriette in her young freshness. But here was the dilemma. Vere was ready enough to suffer to promote the happiness of those whom she loved—ready enough to let Henriette be the joyous butterfly and she the labouring bee. It would have been comparatively easy for her to hide her own trouble, to let no one guess that she was suffering.

There would even have been a sort of pleasure arising out of the pain. Vere would have been as enduring as any fakir in India, assisting at her own tortures when a woman of another nature might have inflicted them on a rival. But what if there was nothing good to arise out of the martyrdom? It would not be possible to put any pressure on a man in the supposed interests of her cousin, nor could she deceive herself into thinking that Godfrey had listened with any show of interest to her account of the alarms—which might be, after all, ungrounded—which she was continually experiencing about her cousin's health.

She watched Henriette with increasing anxiety, but determined, with her usual good judgment, to let matters take their course. These were not long in reaching a climax, for on the following morning, as she was seated at her bureau, which was covered with small bills, Henriette—whose craving for sympathy could no longer be controlled—glided into the room, and threw herself listlessly on the couch.

Never had the contrast between the two girls been more marked than when the elder one, turning from her papers, took her seat by the younger one's side, and, looking her steadily in the face, said :

"If you have anything to tell me, I am ready to hear it," and was completely taken by surprise.

"Have you ever been in love?" whispered Henriette, more than ever like the "Dot" whose childish absurdities had remained unhidden, as she buried her little dark head in the pillow of the sofa.

The elder flushed violently, the bright colour flooding her face and neck. But dissimulation was so impossible to her that she made no reply.

"And your love remains still?"

"That depends on what you mean. Love does not die—it changes sometimes."

"And if it changed?"

"I should submit myself to the will of God, and do my duty."

"With life of one uniform gray tint, like a Quaker bonnet. I could not bear that long and live."

"It is astonishing how easy one finds it to live."

"No, no," said Henriette, fairly breaking down, "it would not be easy—I could not live on all those years."

"My poor child," said Vere, pityingly, "that is only nonsense, though it will do for love-songs. What would become of the world, do you think, if that were the whole of life? There is plenty to do—work enough for women as well as for men on this earth, so full of interest and beauty. I mean what I say," she continued, playing with the girl's hair; "there's much to satisfy in life beside the eternal theme so continually harped upon by boys and girls—it palls in time, and grows a little nauseous. Every novel is full of it, every song; and when you get to my age, it grows namby-pamby, to say the least of it. Why, the little sun goes down, but leaves plenty of brightness and light in life—in nine times out of ten the sun was but a farthing rushlight after all."

She spoke lightly, as if in fun, but Henriette looked at her reproachfully.

"And you—engaged yourself—to speak like this?"

"Who said I was engaged? I have plenty to do, if that is what you mean. And even if I were, why, dear, people would be cowards if they could not bear to be sundered because they loved. Loved—*loved*, do you call it? To go about in a whining way, making the lives of other people wretched! Give it some lesser name." "A childish selfishness, weak, if not contemptible," she would have added, but was afraid of being bitter.

By this time she had her arm round her cousin's neck.

"If life is to be desolate," she said, cheerfully, "it will be because we *make* it so. You and I for the present must be all

in all to each other. For instance, we may try to have larger aims. Limbs grow numb for want of exercise."

She did not know if she had succeeded in comforting Henriette. Probably that young lady had only intentionally extracted a secret from her. But she *did* know that her own great love, which was not limited in kind, had succeeded in conquering a storm which had agitated her; and that—in her readiness to try temporary remedies and palliatives for her cousin's sake—she was pleased to accept thankfully an invitation for Henriette to spend a few weeks with Mrs. Austin, which arrived that same evening.

At Mrs. Austin's house her cousin would hear more of the election, and would probably see more of the Sellwoods. Both reasons were conclusive, especially as the girl herself seemed to weary for change.

CHAPTER V.

AS Reuben parted company with his son at the gate of Broadmeads Park—he himself having proposed that Godfrey should go at once to tell the Miss Rashleighs the events of the day—a man, whom he recognised as a member of the Tarringmoor Town Council, and who had been walking fast to overtake him, came smilingly up to him, and, while he congratulated him on the day's success, warned him that his future prospects might be injured, as some abominable anonymous letters were being circulated at his expense.

"I thought it better to let you know. The writer should be discovered at once and prosecuted; though of course no one cares for such cowardly hitting in the dark, yet at a time like this——" continued his informant, a little embarrassed as he noticed that Reuben became strangely white, and that the veins on his forehead were starting into unusual prominence.

He broke off, confused, in his glib speech, as Reuben answered, in a rasping voice:

"If you want to know *my* opinion of anonymous letters, I look upon them as despicable insults, for the purpose of con-

veying cowardly and infamous calumny. Such mean attempts to bespatter the successful or the rich should be treated with indifference and contempt."

"Oh, very well," said the disconcerted informer, feeling as if he were falling he did not know where, and was half annihilated by this strange man's newly-found powers of speech.

"I should also like to say," continued Reuben, in words which, in their good English, could have been used by Godfrey, though the latter would have shrunk from their tone of immoderate pride, "that, since I have not thought fit to tell the story of my life, all reports circulated about me must be lying inventions."

"There is something ridiculous in his assumption, as if he were so certain of being the right man to fit the right place—he, the poor boy who, by his own admission, worked hard for his bread in our caste-beridden town of Torringmoor," thought the offended town councillor, in derision.

Reuben had been wanting in his accustomed tact. He had not only bared one of his most important secrets to the gaping curiosity of people who had their prejudices of rank and station, but he had now made an enemy of a would-be friend.

He was conscious of his two fold error as he retired into his study. Not only should he have done his utmost to propitiate the Conservative respectabilities of this old-fashioned place, but he should not have defied the consequences of snubbing a Radical, and one who had been ready to help him. His self-justification was that he had been taken by surprise, and that the prudent steering between extremes which Godfrey had recommended as likely to lead to popularity, had ever been hateful to him. He had been a hard-working and persevering man, with triumphs honestly won; a man, hitherto, of few words, and longing for the time when this "palavering" would be over. But he was a man also of strong, instinctive good sense, and he had paled under the information of these anonymous innuendoes, as he immediately coupled them with some annoying advertisements which had appeared for some time in one of the provincial papers, and of which he had determined to take no notice.

Now that he was alone, he locked the door of his study, and took out one of these newspapers, also secured under lock and key in a compartment of a handsome inlaid escritoire. He read it with a curl of scorn upon the mobile lips, which he had always been so careful to hide by the now whitening moustache. It ran:

"If the man known at San Francisco in the year 1849 by the nickname of Jem N——, and now calling himself R. S——,

will communicate with the advertiser, he may avert a terrible danger to which he is at present exposed."

"Jem N——, Jem Nobody—Mr. Nobody, as they called me when I told them, boy-like, that I didn't know my right surname; and I saw no earthly reason why they should not. I had a knack, in those days, of making queer friends," he said to himself, paling again, and devoutly wishing that the advertisement was at Jericho.

He had laughed off the thing in his own mind, having determined to make a *tabula rasa* of his past life. There was nothing behind the scenes of which he considered he had to be ashamed, but his new association with Vere Rashleigh made him guess how refined gentlemen and gentlewomen would receive with horror some of the uncomfortable communications which his old chums might have to make.

"I believe they are all dead, but perhaps I had better write politely to this fellow," he thought, struggling against the overpowering desire to get the lash on the shoulders of some ungrateful person or other.

He sat down, and wrote to one of the officials of the paper.

"If the man who calls himself 'D. B.,' but of whom Mr. Sellwood has no knowledge, will call at Broadmeads to-morrow evening at seven o'clock, Mr. Sellwood will hear what he has to say."

"No doubt the scoundrel who thinks he has some gossip against me is skulking about in the neighbourhood. I'll settle him to-morrow night—scare him with the awful lightnings of the law," he thought, more satisfied with himself, as he enclosed the note in a second envelope, sealed it—but not with the newly-adopted Sellwood crest—and rang for his servant to give orders that another man should ride over to Tarringmoor at once, and see that the letter was deposited in the hands of the editor of the paper.

"Tell him to go in plain clothes, and not to blab out where he comes from," he said to the astute butler, whose experience of the conversational talent of his master would somewhat have startled the aristocrats who had seen fit of late to patronise Reuben, and induce him to enter the presence of the goddess, styled "Society."

"We must not take up too high a tone," Mrs. Austin had said. "Riches are the 'open sesame' to the highest sets in the country, so terribly are things changing of late."

The next day was the one preceding that which had been arranged for the poll, and it was necessary that Reuben should again address a few words to his supporters amongst the

working-men at the Guildhall. Godfrey had hoped for some further evidence of his father's expansion into more manly modes of thought, and wider fields of intellect. But he was disappointed.

From the first the meeting was more earnest than harmonious, and Reuben—who, surrounded by his friends, ascended the platform amid a waving of handkerchiefs, a holding up of hats, and all the signs of the enthusiasm of the previous day—found that he had to struggle through his sentences amidst the hisses, groans, and stampings of his auditors. Directly the unfortunate candidate opened his mouth, he was interrupted by cries of derision such as "Sailin' under false colours." "What's yer raal name, oud chap?" and then another voice, "It's a curious sort o' name." And there was a burst of laughter in answer to the interrupter, who stood close to the platform, and maintained his ground in spite of the counter-cries, "Order, shame—turn him out," with a quiet, half-amused twinkle in his eyes.

"Gi'e the gentleman a heerin'—it's a burnin' shame, when he's doin' his best to help us—that's right, lads," as a number of gloveless, muscular hands were held up in Reuben's honour.

But what had become of Mr. Sellwood's oratory? That very morning he had refreshed his memory with the speech of Marc Antony that he might be prepared in his original way. But now he cudgelled his brains for a word which he wanted in vain.

A murmur rose through the room. There was a shuffling of feet instead of a waving of handkerchiefs. Thoughts and words rushed quickly—pell-mell into the unhappy man's mind. But none of them seemed to suit him. He did not know how to begin. He remembered a certain sentence. It ought to have come in the middle of the harangue. But a lad near him, cried, "Go it, old Californy—we're all a-waiting for yer to begin," and had his ears boxed by a policeman, which created some confusion, and was detrimental to thought.

"Europe has been bristling with arms. The soldiers are maintained at your expense. You are taxed for warfare abroad, and deprived of land at home when you ought to be labouring for the blessings of peace," cried Reuben, with a hoarseness of voice and ungracefulness of manner which were new and alarming to his supporters.

That he, in his desperation, should sound in his turn the note of agrarian agitation, and talk of increasing the productiveness of the land—that provision should be made for peasant proprietors who had succeeded in all other countries but England—seemed like the quintessence of irony to those who knew

his history. A tittering could be heard in the room, and a few boys began to mew like cats.

"He took the land hisself," shouted one of his opponents, in studiously offensive tones.

"His name's not in the parish register," cried another.

Reuben wiped his forehead. His vision was becoming blurred. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. But he continued:

"Where is the England which ought to be the stronghold of the liberties of Europe?—her people have become weak and helpless, her nobles careful only for their own advancement."

He stammered and stopped—unfortunately as if he were inviting the comments which his too responsive audience had already proved itself to be ready to give—but in reality to refresh his memory, portions of this address having been learnt by heart, after being composed in a style which had not been criticised by his son, and now appearing to be like parts of a child's puzzle, very difficult to fit together, and to adjust to the notes with which Godfrey had provided him.

"If England is to be a stronghold," remarked a quiet man, in a voice which was scarcely audible, except to the quickened acuteness of Reuben Sellwood's outraged sense of hearing, "we want people who will build up. There are lots ready to pull down."

A hubbub of interruption ensued. In vain the chairman rapped violently on the table. All his efforts to enforce order were useless. He could with difficulty make his voice heard.

"Wish he'd teach us 'bout *his own* gettin' on in the world. I'm not the man to stay away when there's a hint of *that* sort to be got," cried another stentorian voice.

The speaker was one of the working-men who had been invited among the rest to come forward, ask questions, or say what he knew on the subjects discussed.

"Keep to the point," said the chairman, while Reuben tried to encounter the somewhat impudent, but straight and fearless glance of the man, in which there was not the slightest sign of embarrassment.

"Californy! Californy! Go it, old gentleman! We'd like to immigrate—the lot o' us—if we was sure of gettin' the same chances as you."

"Don't you think it 'ud be a jolly good plan for all the swells to immigrate, and leave room in the old country?" asked another voice, which was greeted with shouts of laughter.

"Damn it all!" cried Reuben, losing his patience, and stamping on the paper which his son had given him, and with

which he had meant to help himself in answering the speakers. He was in a rage with Godfrey at this moment for not drawing it out more effectively, and meant to tell him he had ruined his prospects because the handwriting was detestable.

"Don't swear—it's weak and stupid; it's doing the devil's work, as old Bunyan said, without his wages," observed the same quiet man who had spoken before.

"Methody!" said another, increasing the mirth.

"Ranter, perhaps," retorted a second.

"Raight—he be raight, ranter or not," commented a third. "John Davis knows what he's about—let Davis have his say."

Davis had by this time glided quietly forward, and in a clear, penetrating voice, was addressing the chairman:

"I make bold to come forward, sir, and just say as I've come from the dyin' bed of a mate—as good and honest a man as ever I met since I came to these parts. That man, sir, lived all his days on nine shillings a week and a bit o' a cottage, and had a missus and three children to keep. And, as he lay a-dyin', he thought how he couldn't die comfortable without makin' a will-like. So he says to the missus, 'Get down that 'ere jacket there.' So the missus gave him down his workin'-jacket, and with his poor, weak hands he pulled out two old knives—one as he had when a boy, when he worked for Farmer Jones that had the farm up in the valley, and died three years ago. 'Give that to Jim,' ses he (that war his younger lad), 'and t'other one'—what he'd use hisself till the day he took to his bed—to Jack' (that were his elder boy). 'Tell 'em that's all I got to leave 'em,' ses he. Well, sir, I'd just like for the candidate that's called 'Liberal' to tell us what's a poor man to do when one as has worked all his days and been a God-fearin' man has naught to leave the wife and childer but two ole knives."

Reuben stood meditating his answer, and wishing he had given more attention to Godfrey when the latter had been apt to bother him over-much about the difficult question of what the people were to do when the wages were so unaccountably low, and the folks themselves so terribly poor. He was ready to make any amount of promises *now*, but the words somehow stuck in his throat.

Meanwhile, the last speaker had glided away amongst the crowd. Not so the determined hinderers of the peace.

"Go it, old Dives—tell the Lazaruses what to do," shouted one in his loudest voice, for the amusement of his mates. "We axed yer a plain question—giv' us a plain answer. We wants to know where we chaps is to go to git our bags o' goold."

"Git along, you chattering magpie—here's the p'lice!" cried another, while the orator found himself pulled down by the legs from the bench which he had tried to mount as rostrum.

"Hooray!" cheered the crowd, whilst a wild shriek rang out from one of the women who had been having too much drink, and determined to make the most of the incident.

The workman, who was a heavy, grizzled, bull-headed man, struck out fiercely, with muscular arms, and for a moment there was imminent risk of some of the weaker people near him being trampled upon and rendered insensible, with half their ribs broken.

Then Reuben was himself again. He seemed to be suddenly galvanised into life. His earlier instincts asserted themselves once more, and with them his vernacular and his courage.

"Tek care of the women," he cried, in a voice which ensured obedience. "Most o' you men ha' got heads on your shoulders, and brains in your heads. Don't fight like fools, but go home to your wives and childer. Well—I'll go too—and if—if—you've any respect for me——"

Something whizzed past his ear, and at the same time one of the lights was extinguished. The chairman, who knew that an excited English mob could be brutal enough—before manly feeling and a sense of shame could resume their ordinary sway—rose to adjourn the meeting. But he could not make his voice heard. A policeman was already brandishing his staff, and Godfrey—sick with fear for the results—was proud of his father, as Reuben stood, with his big shoulders heaving and his voice commanding attention, careless of personal danger.

"Be steady, my lads, be steady—be keerful o' the women. I say nothing 'bout violence offered to *me*. But, if there's violence to the weaker sort, the law shall assert itself. It's a burning shame to cause danger for innocent folk."

"Pray come along," whispered one of his committee.

"Tak' care o' yerself," retorted Reuben, proudly. "I'll not go till the hall is cleared."

"I'll stop and help you," said another.

"No need for it," answered Reuben, as—no one knew exactly how—the crowd went out peaceably, and what had seemed a few moments before to be a horrible situation, turned out to be nothing at all.

With the exception of the fact that as Reuben, a few minutes afterwards, descended the stairs in company with his son, he evaded a heavy blow on his back—stooping down, and picking the missile up. It was a large stone. Godfrey rushed after the assailant, who concealed himself in one of the darker

passages, and, by turning and winding, managed to elude pursuit.

He rejoined his father, who was smiling.

"It will do for a relic," remarked Reuben, quietly, as he put the stone into his pocket, and passed through the remaining stragglers and the few policemen, who were never informed of what had happened, on his way to his carriage.

"Dismiss the coachman—or get in yourself. I prefer to walk," he said, shortly, to his son.

"Take care of yourself—there is danger—there is indeed," said Godfrey, wistfully.

Neither did *he* use the carriage, but, feeling it unwise to argue with Reuben in his present mood, made a *détour*, to see what it was possible for him to effect in the town. He must see the committee, to whom he knew that his father had shown scant courtesy and unconventional disrespect. It would be necessary for Godfrey to apologise, and to fix an interview. As he passed on to the committee-room, an acquaintance came up to him, and gave an account of the younger Radical candidate's special oratory that day.

Mindful of his failure on the preceding occasion, Mr. Edgar Dorst had dressed himself with minute care, and had been very sedulous in manipulating certain written notes. Once launched on the stream of florid oratory, there had been no limits to the inducements held forth to the credulous people who had been fooled by his fervid imagination.

"There is a turn in the tide, I fear; it is *he* now who has got the ear of the people."

Godfrey felt something rise in his throat, making him, as he said afterwards, like a big girl. He could scarcely tell why, but he somehow felt proud of his father, and more convinced than he had ever been before of the good impulses which were lurking in Reuben's nature, as he answered impetuously:

"I hate these sort of political rope-dancers, giving promises where they have no right to give them—more daring than the renowned athlete who, instead of cooking omelettes on dangerous heights, developed the brilliant idea of driving young girls over on wheelbarrows. I had rather *not* see young fellows perform antics on the tight-rope of politics with their heads in sacks, risking falls which are likely to harm others as well as themselves."

"You are a young man yourself," laughed his friend.

"I don't feel like one," he answered, with a huskier laugh. "When I was young, I was for settling every question in Heaven and earth; now I have learnt how the 'mills of God grind slowly but surely.' I can keep my mind more in the attitude of suspense. You see I am patriarchal."

"And a sort of political agnostic, or at best a wretched Whig. The Whigs did great things in the past, but now that cautious picking of their footsteps is fatal."

"Call me what you like," he said, a little wearily, "I confess that I have ceased to have dreams of political millenniums, and have little sympathy with the petulant cries or the coarse outbursts of some politicians. No doubt we are groping from old order to new, and in the twilight of a transitional period like this, one does not always see one's own form plainly. I used not to be afraid of the crude and novel, neither do I distrust the future now. But the older I grow the more I learn that sweeping reforms of all sorts—too violently carried out—may only put the clock back, tending to reaction and to tyranny."

"And the working-man?"

"My father was a working-man. I am one myself. But I will confess to you that I am much disabused about many of the brilliant schemes which used to be my programme for the working-man. I have lived among them, and have been haunted by the problem of how to help them for the best, and there have been times when I have almost doubted the feasibility of enlightening the lower stratum of all. I was out of heart *then*. Educate them by all means, and try to help them, but remember that there is a dangerous time in store for them."

"How?" laughed his companion.

Godfrey pondered.

"It will not affect the thing one way or the other if I tell you what I think. But there is a crisis in the life of nearly every man when he wakes to the sickening consciousness of how little prospect of perfect happiness there is for him on this side of the grave; when he is apt to break with past traditions, striking out blindly like a drowning wretch in his struggle to reach his unknown God; and when there are plenty of busy folks too ready to deprive him of the comfort of looking on to a future life. Many of our destitute and overworked operatives are passing through such a crisis, and will pass through it. The miseries of modern life are the result of causes which lie too deep for us to set them right at once. But when men most need help it is when they are lifting their heads from the dense darkness of utter ignorance to the fog in which they are beginning to see."

"Help—how?"

"Don't let them strike their heads and go down to the depths."

"Against what?"

"Well, there are two especial rocks on which men split—it is not I who said it first—God and women."

"Other rocks besides?" asked his companion, lightly.

Godfrey looked grave, for a drunken wretch at that moment staggered past them on the pavement. He had yellow ribbons on, and a yellow placard in his battered hand.

"I'm a martyr," he grinned, "to the 'oly cause o' freedom."

Young Sellwood sighed as he turned away disgusted. The disgust increased as he passed a public-house in which there were maxims placarded about, "The horny hand," "Labour is everything," and others of the same kind.

"Come, come; there is no need for differences of opinion to lead to pugilism," he said, good-naturedly, to a couple of young shopmen, who were standing together on the pavement, and who from hard words seemed to be likely to proceed to blows.

"I was trying to make him see that the English constitution rests on its history and not on theories," explained one of them, a little bombastically and sulkily.

"A constitution which is full of illogisms and contradictions, but which is still the best in the world," said Godfrey, as he succeeded in separating the combatants.

Meanwhile Reuben had chosen a short cut across the fields to Broadmeads. He unconsciously struck at the flowers with his stick, cutting off their heads. There were footsteps behind him, and a shadow fell across him on to the grass, causing him to start and turn round irritably.

"I only wanted to warn yew," said the man who owned the shadow, "ud go through fire and water to serve yew—but," dropping his voice, "there's enemies on yer track."

"Look here—you want money, no doubt—but I've had enough for one day. I'm worn out and worried."

"But I can give you information—don't yew want to be put on your guard?"

"Goodness knows! What is your information worth? Some mare's nest or other."

"It's more nor that."

"You've got hold of some cock-and-bull piece of scandal," said Reuben, angrily. "My man—why do the lot of you hate me so? I'm sorry to say you are fighting against people who help you to get your bread."

"I bain't fighting against no one," said the other, with a mocking laugh. "In time you'll find as I was your friend."

And the fellow cleared the stile with a bound, and disappeared on the other side.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was twilight when Reuben approached the walls of his estate at Broadmeads.

Dark as it was, he could discern white chalk pencilling in large letters near the gateway. He crept closer to the walls, fearing to be noticed, but taking a match-box from his pocket—which he generally carried for his cigars—he lit a wax match and held it to the chalk inscriptions.

The first was, "Down with the impostor—Reuben Sellwood." The next was facetious, "No such person known here—name not in the parish register." The third was, "Liar!"

It was characteristic of Reuben that he had a secret pleasure in defying public comment, and that his spirits rose as he began to think that he might make a clean breast of the whole thing in a letter to the morning paper, and that when he had told the story of his birth the tide of popular feeling would help to give him votes. The punishment for the time had been severe, but no doubt the triumph would be greater.

But when he took up one of the Tarringmoor papers for that evening, it was by no means reassuring. He dashed it down with an oath.

"Cowardly journalists! They worship the bugbear of humanity and yet are afraid of it. They are so-called strong minds, but they are in terror of the foolish spectre which Rousseau conjured up." (He would have known nothing about Rousseau without Vere's reading.) "They dream of a Paradise of equality, and yet, when some one actually born of the dregs of the population appeals to their theories—in real flesh and blood—they kick him and will have nothing of him—it's all pretence, this stuff about the entry of my birth—and they know it themselves; they hate the base-born."

As he entered the house, he was told by the quiet manservant that a couple of gentlemen were waiting for him in his study.

"What sort of men?" he inquired of the butler, who did not immediately answer.

"Begging-letter humbugs, no doubt?—I have told] you to deny me to these impostors."

Something peculiar in the servant's eye made him feel uncomfortable. And then he remembered the appointment of

that evening, which later and more vexatious circumstances had obliterated from his mind.

He awoke to the imminent danger of all the secrets of his past life being known by the people whom he employed.

One of the visitors rose slowly to meet him as he entered the study, inclining himself but slightly, the lower part of his face being partially hidden by the turned-up collar of his great-coat. The other remained concealed in the shadow of the curtains. In spite of the apparent modesty of the intruders, both faces were strangely familiar. The first man who had been pushed forward as if to bear the brunt of Reuben's anger was a square-built man, rather highly-coloured and weather-beaten. He had long, red whiskers and restless eyes, seldom looking at any one when he spoke. And, when he threw back his great-coat, he displayed a satin scarf, fastened with a mock-diamond pin.

"Dick Baker—I didn't guess you were in the land of the living, so I didn't recognise your initials," exclaimed Reuben, with a laugh, as he glanced across him to the other fellow, with the expression of one who felt himself to be fated to evil.

Both of the faces revealed potentialities of ferocity, but that of the taller and darker man was especially cruel. An acute physiognomist would have detected, in the handwriting on it, the triumphant perversity of a life which had submitted to no restraint, nor shrunk from the lowest forms of corruption. The brows revealed intellect, and its fine sweep could not be entirely destroyed. But in the puffy cheeks, the Bardolphian nose, the eyes, half enclosed in folds of loose skin, and the lewd, smiling, self-contented mouth there was a sort of resemblance—of which this man, who called himself a gentleman, was proud—to the later portraits of Francis I.

A sneer sat on the mocking lips, and his laughter was bitter as he rejoined :

"And so you had killed me off, as well as poor Dick. You might be a little more grateful. You forget that this is a personal matter, and it was your own fault if you did not give it the immediate attention which for your own sake we desired."

He had the style of a reasonably well-educated man, and his off-hand manner came natural, as if he had practised it from his boyhood.

Reuben's face was impassive, though his heart beat tumultuously.

"I fail to catch your meaning. I knew you both at San Francisco, was associated with you at the gold-diggings, was obliged to you for assistance. But I knew too much of you to desire your further acquaintance."

"That was the reason you did not answer our advertisement?" And there was a flash as if of steel from the small eyes half-enclosed in the baggy folds beneath them.

"Why should it mean *me* — that foolish advertisement in the paper? Loads of other people have the same initials."

"If you knew all that *we* know, you would jump at the offer we have to make yer," said the square-shouldered man, with the air of one who had laid a trap and looked for another to be caught in it.

"If I knew!" repeated Reuben, in a mystified manner, but feeling as if something disgraceful could be the only way out of these sudden complications. "Do you mean to say that you have acted the spy upon me all these years?"

"Ah! you hear un. He have waited till time should bleach him white—ha! ha!" laughed the red-headed scamp, nudging his more formidable companion, who stood behind him.

"I have not the faintest idea to what you allude," answered Reuben, in his most telling English; "but I know there were many queer passages in my life as there are in the lives of most adventurers. And if you have trumped up something against me, and suppose you can excuse it to your consciences—your consciences, which are so ragged and battered after the way in which you used to treat 'em that I wonder you can put 'em into working order at all—out with it at oncê—let us hear the worst o' it. But understand, once and for all, you'll not have a stiver out of me."

The annoyance had become horrible. Reuben's cheeks were blanched. The perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. He seemed to anticipate something terrible, as he gazed, with haggard face and burning eyes, at the intruders.

He had seen enough of these men at the gold-dig-gings, and afterwards in the States, to make him aware that they knew of his being engaged in all sorts of large speculations, and of the prosperity which attended these speculations.

"They want to get money out o' me," he said, between his teeth; "but they have not the shadow of a claim to a farthing."

The shorter man crept back, cowed by the rage in him, which already amounted to a passion of fury.

"Are you not a little *warm*?" asked the other, with a sarcastic smile. "I envy you your life. After the large scale on which you have worked, it must be pleasant to kick up one's heels in this old Eden here. For my part, I can't put myself

out to grass yet awhile—I'm too fond of excitement and travel, and if you listen to me, instead of being so peppery——”

“Listen to *what?*” asked Reuben, with the veins on his forehead again starting into prominence.

“I suppose you are aware that your name has been coupled with a disgraceful story, which has——”

Reuben waved his hand disdainfully. He prided himself on having nothing to do with those scavengers of society, the purveyors of tittle-tattle, and would have swept the place clean of such trash had he been able. He began :

“I am not answerable for all the gossip of this place.”

But the other burst into a laugh which jarred on him, and then, creeping up nearer to Reuben, whispered a name into his ear.

The effect of the name was magical.

“Poor lad!” the master of Broadmeads tried to articulate. But a tremor had seized his lips. “It was a horrible story,” he added. “We meant no harm; but we were all to blame. What more could we have done? The unhappy fellow couldn't swim.”

“Poor devil! he was not the first to get drowned in that fashion. But it was *you* who proposed it, and you who must pay the penalty; there's a tale of manslaughter against you—or murder—or what you choose to call it. We come to you as friends; the evidence is all in our hands. And, unless you pay us well, we mean to make it public.”

A fugitive colour appeared on Reuben's haggard cheeks. He coughed, and passed his hand between his collar and his neck, as if the former was too tight to allow him to breathe.

“Did they——?” His voice died off; he could not finish the sentence.

“Hush! speak low,” said the other, bending forward. “Did they dig up the body, did you ask? It was *you* who suggested it should be buried close by in the sand. We dug it up long ago. Dick Baker knows where to find——”

“It's a diabolical accusation invented by the wickedest malice,” cried Reuben, leaping to his feet.

“Dunno,” said Baker, from a safe distance, with the table between himself and his exasperated listener; “it do begin to look fishy. Some one says as how you had a grudge against the poor rascal, and he one of the weakly sort, and when we found the goold—you mind that day—we was a'most starving, the four of us, and you and Pierce took the lead? Well, we found the goold at last in a large queer sort of a hole, with a torrent o' water rushing down from the heights upon it, and you said as how the force o' the water for ages past was enough to cause the depth o' the 'ole.”

Pierce nodded his head.

"It was about thirty feet," he interposed, "with perpendicular rocks on either side, and the water cold as ice ; but the gold that glittered at the bottom ! Enough to enrich the population of a city !" and he rubbed his hands at the recollection of it.

"Well, it was *your* proposal—to tie a cord round the wretch's body, and let him down to get at the gold, and, when we draw'd him hup, he was dead."

"*Liar—cowardly liar!*" cried Reuben. "You know well enough we proposed it between us ; I was let down myself."

"You—you can swim like a rat," and Baker burst into a mocking laugh.

"If I could swim, my teeth chattered—my blood was frozen—and yet I did it."

"It was easy to you—it was death to him," said Pierce, with his tormenting eyes fixed on his victim.

"I protested against his going—but you jeered at him—and roused his pride—you insulted him ; and he threw himself violently into the water," answered Reuben, in desperation.

"Who is the witness of that ? We are two against one."

"And others in Californy," added Baker. "We has their signatures to show."

For the first time in his life, Reuben flinched, as though he had been struck, and stared at his accusers, breathing hard. He hesitated a little before speaking, but when he spoke it was in a manner so decided that the first sensation of those who had plotted against him was that their project had miscarried.

Turning disdainfully from the fellow whom he called Dick Baker, he addressed himself to Pierce.

"It is disgraceful. You have crossed my path more than once before in my life, but you shall not cross it again. If I ever did what was bad, it was through your influence ; and, if you think that you're to have the upper hand of me agen, you're mightily mistaken. I won't give way a bit. *Did you ever know me give way ?*"

"You've been having a fine time of it," said Pierce, with facetiousness. "Now, if you'd listen to me, instead of being so impetuous——"

"I will not listen to you. Why, to listen to you is to mix myself up in all the vile schemes of your plague-spotted life—crime piled upon crime, and the whole loathsome heap white-washed like a sepulchre."

"You speak strongly," answered his tormentor, with a laugh.

"Not too strongly for you."

"Well, we will leave till you are in a sweeter temper—or make our story known to the municipal corporation, or the Tarringmoor newspapers—while the trifle of a few thousands—which would never be missed by you——"

Reuben turned on him with an oath, which he was never likely to forget. The unutterable bitterness and disgust of life which he felt, after the overpowering events of the day, had rendered him indifferent to consequences. The whole thing was like a lurid nightmare, that, because in the madness of his ambition he had mixed himself up with politics, this fellow, with his trap so skilfully set to catch him, should bring upon him an accusation more terrible than death. He was sick at the thought of the gossip and the cruelty of the criticism which he saw to be hanging like an avalanche over his head. And yet—since Vere's influence had been brought to bear upon him, since Godfrey had unconsciously accustomed him to think of nobler things—the alternative proposed, to buy these wretches off with money, was impossible.

"I suppose it will be rather a wrench to part with so large a sum, but it will be a greater wrench to be denounced to the world in general as——"

The shot struck hard, but it also sharpened Reuben's rage. If passionate hate could lead a man to commit a murderous assault, it is astonishing that Pierce was not felled to the ground at that moment. Accustomed as Reuben had been to crush opposition, and, from a long course of habit, dictatorial, if not violent, the last threat seemed to exasperate him beyond the bounds of endurance.

He leaped to his feet, and approached Pierce, who cowered into his corner as if he feared that the rich man whom he had come to intimidate would be likely to lay violent hands on his person. Dick Baker crouched down on the opposite side of the table, with flagrant abandonment at even a pretence of the virtue of courage. Then Reuben as suddenly drew back, as if from a reptile. To come in contact with Pierce's person would have seemed to him as repulsive as to touch a loathsome toad. The face which had flushed, the eyes which had gleamed, and the hands which had trembled grew suddenly still.

"Leave my house," he said, "scoundrel! Oh, you need not be afraid. I have a long score of insults and cruelties to repay you, but this last insult of all is beneath my notice. Come, you have contrived it very cleverly—the devil himself couldn't have managed it better. I almost think the devil himself must have taken up his residence in your body. But dare to ask me for blood-money—for the innocent chap I loved—killed by a cruel accident, through the rage for gold *you* taught us—you, the so-

called gentleman, but the greatest cad of all amongst us, hatching your serpent's brood of wickedness from the greed for money which possessed you. Not one farthing of mine shall you have, if you begged on your knees for it. But to enter my house and dare to threaten me, as if you did not know that I would sooner a thousand times quit this miserable masquerade, and pitch the whole lot o' the money into the sea than tighten your diabolical toils around me—and—and——"

He shrank from speaking more plainly. The disgust with which the thing had inspired him was mastering him again. But, with a sort of gasp, he resumed his speech.

"Ask yourself if I will ever alter what I have said. Have you ever known me change my purpose, or abandon a determination? I was an uneducated lout when you met me at San Francisco, smarting from a sense of wrongs which gave you a sort of hold on me. But could you ever make me change my ground—could your inducements appeal to me, could——?"

"You—you were very tenacious, certainly," muttered the other man, who saw that he could expect no assistance from Baker, and who staggered back pale from fear. It was not the first time in his life that he had stood in dread of Reuben's muscular arm, and he knew that a blow from such an assailant might injure his shattered frame.

"Then begone—both of you—or I will summon some of my men, and you shall be kicked down every stair of this house till you reach the door."

"You are mad—for to-morrow morning all the town shall ring with this—we have already got the paragraph printed—we——"

"Oh, I care nothing for to-morrow morning—not a snap of the fingers for this election—or your contemptible threats either. But I have it from your own lips—you remember my tenacity of purpose—that Reuben Sellwood——"

"Jem Nobody," interrupted Pierce, with a feeble attempt at a sardonic laugh.

"The name signifies little. If *you* were a gentleman—I rejoice that I was a working-man and a democrat. But I wish to remind you that the man who stands before you has passed through other struggles, and that when he was rough and beggarly in aspect—even then he was accustomed to command respect. How did he command it? By never going back from his word, by never faltering in a purpose on which he had set his heart. You can practise on my reputation as much as you like—you have chosen your time well. But I have taken my resolution. I care nothing for entering Parliament, compared with my determination to see you stand in your rightful place—the dock. Now—begone."

CHAPTER VII.

REUBEN had spoken truly. No audacity could rival his own. No effeminate indecision, no paralysis of will had ever made him swerve from the path he marked out for himself. It was, after all, a wonderful character—the passion and energy in it could scarcely rival its force.

Its very eccentricity was the outcome of the seeds sown in early youth. He saw this after the men had quitted him. The very foulness of their accusations had revealed to himself that atrophy of the moral senses which had allowed him to be maddened at this unfounded charge, whilst all the time—as God only knew—another murderous impulse had been at work in his heart.

“God help me—if there is a God,” he thought, as he sat with his head buried in his hands. “Who can say that I was not the indirect means of hastening old Sir George’s death? I forgave the old man at last, but I would have given a deal—when it was too late—to know that no letter o’ mine had reached him before his fall.”

Sir Ralph had assured him on his deathbed that he thought he had no cause to reproach himself for the accident, and it was astonishing how kindly disposed Reuben had felt since to the whole Rashleigh family.

He even wished that Sir Ralph was alive that he might go to him and pour out his woes. He knew so little of law himself that he could not anticipate his opponent’s plan of arranging a campaign against him. He was only determined that this plot should be frustrated, and his determination of bringing one of the greatest rogues who had ever lived to justice gave him for the moment an actual feeling of excitement almost bordering on pleasure.

Yet, strong as his nervous system was, it had been so shaken that, as the retreating footsteps of the villains died away, he could almost have been certain that the table on which he was leaning his arms was reeling, the floor giving way beneath him, and the walls advancing as if to crush him.

It was a relief when the gong sounded for dinner. Knowing how imprudent it would be to disturb his father when the latter had retired to his own apartment, Godfrey had not been near him yet. The house was large, and it was so difficult to

know what was going on in one part of it while he himself was occupied in another, that he had contented himself with thinking :

"It is a harassing day—and my father may have important business of his own."

But the family meal was somewhat more formal than usual, the gaiety flat and forced. And long afterwards Godfrey remembered how he had been struck by an unusual expression on his father's face—how the forehead seemed to have become narrower—the lips closed in a firm line which was apparent in spite of the partial covering of the beard, and how the high thin nostrils had sometimes quivered as if with repressed emotion. Yet Reuben tried to joke in a tone of voice which was a little too highly pitched in its attempt at being bright, and which was quite out of keeping with his facial despondency. He drank deeply of champagne, and, if anything, seemed to be a trifle too jovial. Some of the members of his committee, who had been invited to dine with him, separated early, as each had work in preparation for the morrow. Godfrey went out with one of them, and Reuben strolled to the gate smoking a cigar.

When he was alone his look became serious, and after hesitating for a moment he also went outside the gates, and finding that the road was clear sauntered up to the wall, and striking a wax match examined it closely.

The chalk writing had been added to, and beneath an inscription in large letters, "Sailing under false colours," another and smaller one had been added. Perhaps no one but himself could have deciphered it—the handwriting was so small, as if the coward who had written it had shivered at the recollection of possible consequences. But Reuben saw it clearly—it was "Murderer." An artist of somewhat unpractised talent had even depicted a miniature gallows, and on it was a figure on which again was inscribed "Slaughterer."

The unknown seas of feeling and rage which had been within him, rising in him, and threatening to overwhelm him, made his pulse beat again with unhealthy irregularity—his heart giving rapid beats, and then seeming as if it would stop.

"Am I mad?" he thought, as he passed his hand rapidly over his eyes, disdaining to rub away the atrocious lie which was recorded on his own walls in the rough chalk.

It had been easy to doubt as to the coherence of the "mind-stuff" of such flabby personal existences as those which Dick Baker and Edgar Pierce had ruined by gambling and drink ; easy enough for Reuben—had he not been a professed materialist—to picture to himself the possibility of such minds

being "obsessed" by evil denizens of the spiritual world. Such men were either mad or possessed by the devil, if there was a devil—an alternative on which Reuben placed a mental reserve. But he who had been ever temperate till this night, and industrious according to his lights, why should *he* be doomed to undergo such tortures?

It was as if an abyss had opened before him, and as if the kick which was suddenly to overturn all his bricks had been brought about by his own imprudence. Why had he ever attracted attention to himself by entering the political arena, for which, after all, he was not fitted? He had a keen sense of treachery to himself.

He did his best to restrain his ebullitions of temper. But when the man-servant at ten o'clock announced that Miss Rashleigh had come, accompanied by her old housekeeper, and had something important to tell him about the morrow, he turned on him a face so pale and agonised that the man asked, a little curiously:

"Are you ill, sir? I can make an excuse for the lady to come in the morning, if so be——"

"I'm not ill—any more than you are," thundered Reuben; "it's no business o' yours," thus making a fresh enemy for himself.

In another minute Vere was in the room. She visibly shrank from the meeting at so unaccustomed an hour, and lost her composure, as she exclaimed:

"Mr. Sellwood—you will think it odd. But they have been saying all sorts of cruel things about you in the town. And—I—I—it would be no business of mine—only you know how you offered me a home—and how I cannot say how much I thank you—I would trust you, if no one else in the world were to trust you—I know how good you can be—how you would not allow an affront to be put on my uncle—and—when somebody came to me late to-night—and said that an old woman who is dying has a story to tell—and can clear up the mystery of your birth—before—to-morrow—time is short," she added, energetically, but rather confusedly, with tears standing in her eyes. "I—I came to tell you—it is important that you should go to see this woman to-night."

"Impossible," he answered. He spoke slowly, almost sternly. At that moment she seemed to him not as a pleader, but as an inquisitor, who had come with the curiosity of her sex to probe the wound from which he was already suffering.

"Why impossible?" The tears in her eyes were more impressive than her words, but her voice was trembling. "The woman may die—every hour is of importance."

Her weakness made him ashamed. He cared much for this

girl, whose sympathy had raised him from previous despair. He still looked upon her as his future daughter—the wife destined for his son. By erasing himself, he hoped to make the marriage more feasible.

“I will tell you what I can tell no one else. You have a right to my explanation. If I seemed to speak abruptly—it is because I am going away very soon. It does not matter to me what people think about me—my birth or anything. I am sick of craving for notoriety, for money, position, or anything else.”

“*Very soon?*” she asked, amazed. “Isn’t your decision a strange one?”

“It is the result of a day’s reflection.”

“You do not mean——”

“I will tell you frankly. I have got into so queer a groove. I find so great a divergence between the lives of ordinary people and my own—I crave so for rest—for escape into a different air—that I have decided to leave this very night.”

“No, no!” cried Vere in alarm. “Oh! it is not possible—it would be too dreadful—they will put the very worst construction on your flight.”

He looked at her, and tried to smile. He did not consider himself a coward. Indeed, it was his intention to do his utmost to grapple with what seemed to be a pitiless, inexorable fate.

“I have ceased to care what people think.”

It made him more conscious of the jangled dissonance in his own life, when he thought of the sweet self-sacrifice and dutifulness of hers. He had not done this thing, but as he looked at her he became conscious of what it was to bear about a silent court of justice “in himself,” to be arraigned as a prisoner at the bar, condemned in other things by the judge and jury of his own accusing conscience. He had deliberately planned the misery of this girl’s family, and now on his own path to prosperity was the drawn sword and gleaming robe of the avenger.

“Sometimes,” he said, speaking half to her and to himself, “I have a feeling that it might have been better for me never to have been born.”

She came nearer to him and took his hand.

“Mr. Sellwood, for the love of God, don’t talk like that! Go away—for ever, do you mean? You are desperate and full of morbid fancies. Shake them off—see this woman to-night—the cloud which hangs over you now will be cleared away.”

“No, I was wrong to come back to the old country—I was

too rough for it. It would have been wiser to buy another spade and a rifle, and go back to some wilderness on the other side o' the Atlantic."

She tried to answer him after his own fashion, but he could not tell her that there was likely to be a brand set on his name—a real dishonour which he could never recover—and that he had fancied once or twice, when he listened at the back of the house, that he heard footsteps as of men approaching to arrest him. A sort of terror, which deprived him of his usual nerve and good sense, had taken possession of him.

Again the scene came before his eyes, which had always affected and haunted him, of a band of rough men, principally young, but of different nationalities—herded together for the discovery of gold in a strange land, some of them ill from the exhaustion of unusual exertions, and one—a delicate Italian boy, unused to the vicissitudes of climate, and but lately separated from his mother. Reuben had protected and helped the lad, but when Pierce, who was the leader of the party, had suggested that each should take it in turn to dive for the precious metal in an abyss of water which seemed to some of them like the gate of death, it had been easy to foresee danger for the boy, who could neither swim nor incur without foolhardiness the shock of the icy chill. Reuben had tried in vain to dissuade the lad, but when the poor fellow, goaded by taunts, had allowed himself to be lowered by cords into the stream, and was drawn up again a corpse, he, as well as the others, had improvised a hasty grave, and agreed to say nothing about it. Such things were common enough at a time and in a place where Lynch-law was powerless to punish mistakes, and could only inflict vengeance for deliberate crime.

But that the pitiful story should crop up again, in a form which he in his wildest dreams could never have anticipated, and be used as means of extortion by men who would swear away their own souls—if false-swearing could bring them money—had nearly maddened him, and deprived him of his usual power of thought.

"Listen," he said. "Godfrey will be coming ; it is too late for me to upset you by telling you anything else now ; but, if I leave to-night, I should not like you to think badly of me. I will write."

"I am not upset. Let your son go with you ; it will be better to tell him all about it, and to take him to travel with you in the same train."

She had risen to her feet as she said this, and stood before him erect yet pleading.

"You think I have taken leave of my senses—that I want a

keeper," he said, with a shrug. "I dare say others will think so too. They will shake their heads over me to-morrow, and suppose that I have gone for a spree on the Continent."

"Take some one," she repeated.

"Speak lower," he said. "We must not be heard. My own son thinks badly enough of me already. He is the last man in the world whom I wish to know about this. I must trust you not to tell him a word."

She saw that there was nothing to be done but to humour him. But not the less, when she stood outside, did she rally herself by the force of her character. Her hands were painfully squeezing each other, but the forehead was no longer drawn into distressful puckers. She no longer felt as if she had lost herself, her better self, and as if all this was a dream, in which she was taking no active part. She had made up her mind what to do.

CHAPTER VIII.

LONG after the household had retired to rest that night, Reuben opened the drawers in his study, and threw packets of letters into the fire. His dog, as if it suspected something terrible, was scratching at the door. He pushed it gently into the room, shut the door on it, then huddling his hat over his brows, and taking the precaution to put on an old great-coat, pulling the collar up to his ears, he crept out by the back passage, which had been specially planned by the architect of the house that the steward might have interviews with the poorer people.

"God help me, if there be a God," he murmured again, as he crept into the outer air. The vague, unsatisfied craving after something beyond and without him, the glimmer of instinct which made him sometimes feel after the world in which he had said he had no belief, was stronger than usual within him now. He looked up at the starlit sky, and wondered with a groan how God could remember his soul amongst the

seething multitude of worlds. The verse in the Psalms came back to his memory, and he could not even hope to be hidden in the darkness. It was cowardly perhaps to fly, and more cowardly to groan "too late," but his eyes seemed to be opened to see the lost opportunities of a wasted life.

He had determined to change clothes with a working-man to whom he had been kind, and who would not betray his secret.

Meanwhile Vere, who suspected some strange secret, and who had an earnest desire to sacrifice herself in any way to help him, had been also making her way through the slumberous moors on this starlight night. It had been only old Nancy's great fidelity which led her, as she thought at the risk of her life, to follow her daring young mistress, as the latter plunged into the night air, supposed by the old woman to be charged with malarious mists fatal to the young and the old. She had grumbled not a little when, after a long whispered conversation with the village lad who had been engaged to act as guide to them in their journey, Vere had apparently dismissed him, though at the same time she took money from her pocket, and seemed to be paying him extravagantly.

There was a touch of stubborn desperation in the way in which her young lady said, in a voice calm and clear :

"This way, Nancy dear—he has told me where to go, through the wood and then over the stile above, right on amongst the heather to Bill Saxtens'—there is a poor old soul there who is dying ; we must not wait till the morning, or she may be dead."

"Dear heart alive," protested Nancy, but just then a dark cloud passed over the face of the sky, and she shuddered, clinging closer to the soft hand which was caressing hers, as if to give her the power to go on when her poor old body was crushed and limp.

"Would you like it, Nancy dear, if *you* were lying dying and I refused to come?"

There was no answer to this appeal, and Vere continued :

"If you owed a person a great deal, would it not be a cold and cruel injustice to repay his generosity by deserting him just when the rest of the world were beginning to give him up?"

Meanwhile Vere was coaxing her companion on, showing her how to place her feet so as to avoid the difficult stones. But in spite of the strength of her will her heart sometimes misgave her, and it struck her with a sort of chill to think of the horrible mistake she might have made, prejudicing Mr. Sellwood's interests instead of helping them, by obeying the mysterious summons which had been sent to her. Vere was

not a woman to reject a man utterly on account of a criminal past, but for Godfrey's sake she shuddered. Was it wise to challenge an investigation of Reuben's past life from which he himself evidently shrank?

The chilly feeling was growing stronger every moment, and Vere's eyes were arrested the moment she entered the cottage by the look of ghastly horror in the face of the aged figure which was lying on the bed. A figure which seemed to her at first to have little of the semblance of life. The wrinkled, white-lipped woman looked pale indeed, and the whiteness of the hair added to the singular effect.

It was only when she came nearer to her that Vere saw how the forehead was damp with cold perspiration, and how the claw-like hand was shaking more with strange excitement than with fear. The sick woman even made an effort as if to raise her head from the pillow, and seemed to feel for something with the other hand which she had concealed under her pillow.

"Yes, yes, Goody—it be right enough; yew shall give it to the leddy; she du hev troubled over it terrible," said a woman who stood near her. "She be ninety year old, o' more," she whispered to Vere, "an' sune o' us think as she be *that* queer in her head."

It was evident enough, as these words were uttered, that the figure could *hear*. For the eyes, which had glittered as the only sign of life, were distended again with the look of horror which had struck Vere when at first she had entered the room.

The few women who were gathered round the sick-bed, with the singular interest which the poor invariably take in death, retreated as if in fear, and Nancy clutched Vere's arm.

"There be times when I thinks as she be a witch. There she was a-mutterin' to herself afore ye came, as she heerd a voice, and knowed as ye was cumin'," said the woman who spoke before, apparently possessing more nerve than the others, and bending over the dying woman to shake up her pillow.

"In the dark ages the poor creature would have been burned," thought Vere, as a tender feeling came into her face, and she set herself, with her usual firmness, to the difficult task.

"You have something to tell me?" she asked, bending over the unhappy creature, who was making futile efforts to speak.

The encouraging, yet grave smile with which Vere spoke seemed to abridge the struggle somewhat. Yet it was some little while before the silence was broken.

"It is something on your conscience—you feel as if you cannot die without confessing it?" asked Vere, with a pathetic cadence in the true ring of her voice which seemed to stir some hidden feeling in the dying woman, though as yet there came no answer.

"Be it 'bout them babbies, Elspeth, as you were a-tellin' o' me? Now, didn't you dream it all, Goody?" asked the other woman, encouragingly. "You said as how ye changed 'em, didn't ye?"

"Hold up your hand if you cannot answer," said Vere, trying to help, as another effort was made for the failing breath, and a sort of wild vindictiveness came into the white face.

"Dhrame!" she said, in a harsh whisper. "I tell ye it were no dhrame! I changed the blessed cratur, and left him for a beggar's brat—as wur my ain young leddy's. The curse o' God ha' blasted me iver since, and yet I did it for the raight."

"Tell the leddy 'bout them names," persevered the other woman, while Vere listened with the sick feeling caused by a new sort of dread, and yet in ignorance as to whither these questions tended.

"My young leddy's—'twas the heir. I heerd 'em say—too late—as the title and all the property wur his. He wur Sir George's eldest son. His mother wur raightly wed; here be the weddin' lines." And, with an effort of strength such as the dying sometimes make, she tried again to draw from beneath her pillow a leathern parcel which she had worn attached by a string to her neck.

Vere's mind had been instinctively casting out feelers, as if for escape from a new perplexity, during this conversation. So that at times she scarcely heard the questions which were asked by Bill Saxtens' wife, and her thoughts were unconsciously veering to the other question of whether the sharp lad whom she had set to watch Reuben's movements would be able to telegraph to her with the assistance of the clerk at the office. But at the sound of Sir George's name she began to give her attention. Then this baby, whoever he was, must have been a relation of hers. Ah! that was it. Her uncle, her father's elder brother by another marriage, said to have died when his mother died—and—— Her mind could not follow. For a minute she was in a state of expectant suspense, staring at Mrs. Saxtens with a look of horrified inquiry.

The whole story, which began to dawn upon her, seemed at first to be so ridiculously impossible—so absurdly like that of the "Claimant" of newspaper renown, or of heroes of penny

dreadfuls—believed, by the people who read such sensational romances, to have been “kep’ out o’ their own” by some wicked scheming of usurping relations—that she had much difficulty in believing it. Old-world and childish myths of Perseus in his box on the waters; Romulus and Remus abandoned to the tender mercies of a wolf, or of the she-bear which was said to have looked after Paris, floated before her memory. She remembered that all the boys so got rid of turned out to be rightful heirs when their presence was least expected, and that the lesson—inculcated thousands of years before—was that Fate was not to be eluded nor prophecy unfulfilled.

To connect the matter-of-fact and nineteenth-century Reuben with such a romance was somehow so incongruous that, had it not been for the solemn circumstances, she felt as if she must have burst into hysterical laughter.

“Poor young lady—it is too much for her,” said Mrs. Saxtens, pityingly. “It do hurt her to hear o’ this, and such a time o’ neet!”

“The question is not whether it hurts me, but whether it is true or not,” answered Vere, her voice calm and clear as usual. “I see that this bag contains a copy of the marriage certificate of my uncle’s first wife, and the birth certificate of their child. The child was supposed to have died—it was buried in due form.”

“But the old ’oman changed the children herself—she hev signed the writing afore you came,” answered Saxtens, who seemed to be more reasonable than the rest of the listeners, handing a piece of paper, in which he himself had taken down the confession, and to which the sick woman had added her rough signature.

“That ’eer parcel fell off the blessed child when she changed its cleughs,” added Saxtens’ wife—the dying woman being evidently unable to say more, and suffering from that physical exhaustion which often comes to make the sting of death more bearable.

“We must not distract her with questions now,” was Vere’s dominant thought. “It is not right that she should be worried any more about this,” as Mrs. Saxtens rattled on:

“She walked miles when she were not fit—ower ninety, as she be—heerin’ as how they was insultin’ Mr. Sellwood, by calling ’im base-born, and his name not in the register. And, ses I, ‘He’d best come and heer it from her own lips, and then—there’s no saying—p’r’aps he’ll b’lieve it.’”

Vere no longer heard her. She could not spare time just then in considering a matter—of which, after all, she knew little—of how far this signed confession and the certi-

fications in the woman's possession would be important in a court of law. She had fallen on her knees by the bedside of the unhappy creature. The first bewilderment which had confused her at the unexpectedness of the revelation no longer troubled her for the next few minutes. Her trust in God was too great to allow her to take a despondent view of things, and the custom, to which she had used herself from early years, of looking out for her next duty and trying to perform it, came to her assistance now, and helped to clear her troubled thoughts.

Vere lingered in Mrs. Saxtens' cottage till all was over, and the last sad offices had to be performed for the quiet dead. As she left the house it was full daylight, and poor Nancy, who had been napping at intervals during the night, limped so slowly homewards as to cause further delay, while her young mistress dared not betray her impatience.

As they passed through the village, groups of men were already tramping from various directions, with scornful laughs on the lips of some of them, and lowering dismay on the faces of others.

"I axed thee a plain question, lad—giv' a plain 'answer," said a man, impatiently, to his mate, as she passed. "Be it true or not, that Mister Sellwood is not i' the place?"

"Here's Joe here wants to know—wher the swell is gone."

"Californy or Joosalum, for awt I cares," answered another, with a laugh.

"I tell ye there is a plot against him—anyhow, he's hoff—and there be chaps employed a'ready to scour the country, right and left, to find 'im."

"Oh, it is too dreadful!" thought Vere, as she hurried on. She was beginning to feel the fatigue of the night's watch, and, with lips parched and tongue dry, had a new horror of impending disaster.

"Mind how you tread—the path is slippery—take care," she said to old Nancy, to cover her own confusion. "Pray come along," she whispered, as she took her arm.

And the two glided silently through the now gathering crowd.

Henriette was waiting for them, though it was but nine o'clock.

"Where have you been?" she asked, looking at her cousin, who was paler than usual, with a harassed expression of face, and covered with dust. And then, not waiting to be answered, she added, "I suppose you have been helping in the search for Mr. Sellwood? His servants gave the alarm, they say, as early

as six o'clock. His bed hasn't been slept in, and they think he has made away with himself. And as to Godfrey, he is enlisting the services of all sorts of people—who are scouring the country, and hunting the copses and ditches?"

"How can I answer so many questions when you pour them out upon me at once—even supposing I knew," said Vere, hopelessly.

There was something in Henriette's manner which alarmed her—as if the girl were tired of playing the child, and had determined to take a stand of her own which she had never taken before.

"Why didn't you tell me you were engaged to Godfrey Sellwood?" she asked, suddenly. "Many things might have been different, if you had told me that."

"I could not tell you what was not true."

"Do you mean to say you were not engaged to him?"

"I offered myself to him once. He refused me. What more would you have me tell?"

"I suppose it is all a mistake—a queer mistake. Mrs. Austin told me that you two cared for each other. I thought it was somebody else, but certainly Godfrey Sellwood used to linger about here in an unaccountable manner."

"To flirt with *you*," said Vere, with a smile.

"No, you are wrong there. I soon found out he didn't care for me, and I like him much better as a future husband for you."

A new light began to dawn upon Vere. Mrs. Austin had probably managed all this, and had plotted to have Henriette at her house that she might practise her usual skilful diplomacy. It was kind of her, but Vere rather resented such interference.

"After all, he had a good reason for not asking anybody to marry him. It would have killed any woman to hear the things which they say of his father."

"Henriette, I cannot stay and listen to such talk. Who cares about the things? Saying them will not prove them."

"Then it is worse than I thought," said the impressionable Henriette. "Promise me you will not marry him. I should like anything to make a change in my life. But you—you are old-fashioned enough sometimes, with odd ideas about things, but good and noble for all that. Why, I shouldn't—" And Henriette's varying face was now laden with a look of resolution and prophetic woe.

"Nonsense, child—all this excitement is too much for you. You are not going to drop people who were so much to you yesterday, just because there is a little gossiping about them to-day. Let me give you some coffee, and then I can hire a fly

to take you back to Mrs. Austin's. She will amuse you better than I can. I am terribly tired."

An hour afterwards Vere was alone, and the telegram which she had expected was put into her hand. The message was explicit enough, and even in the midst of her sorrow she felt a little triumphant to think that young Mitchell had not been taught at the night-school, which she herself had started, for nothing. The telegram stated that he had followed Mr. S. to Liverpool, and found that he had taken passage in a ship which did not sail till that night for America.

After this she dressed herself neatly, taking the precaution to carry warm wraps on her arms and to hide her face in a thick gauze veil. In a bed-room above, old Nancy was sleeping quietly, and Vere trod so softly that she could not be disturbed. In the kitchen below another servant—a middle-aged woman who had often been assisted by her young mistress in the preparation of difficult dishes during Sir Ralph's invalidism—was busy preparing the usual middle-day meal. She was too well used to Miss Rashleigh's superintendence of all that concerned the welfare of the household to be startled when the latter opened the door. But she stared a little when Vere said, with pallid face and decided manner :

"Jane, a relation of mine is in distress—perhaps in danger of his life. I have made up my mind to go at once to Liverpool to look after him. It will not do for me to go alone, but I have counted on your readiness to go with me. We shall probably return again to-morrow. Can you oblige me by getting ready at once?"

"Law, yes, miss," said the somewhat disconcerted Jane. "I've never been so far, as I knows of, in my lifetime—but if so be as you must go yerself—why, it stands to razon as yer can't go alone."

Vere, who was accustomed to being obeyed, had won the woman's heart by the constant and benevolent interest which she took in the happiness of her servants. And yet it was evident that Jane got ready unwillingly. She was one of the people who are suspicious of everything new, and who believe that old arrangements are in no need of reformation.

She was sufficiently slow in preparing for the journey to leave time for her mistress to write letters which she had determined to write.

The first was to her cousin Henriette :

"Do not think it strange if I did not tell you this morning. I shall probably be back again before you have time to miss me. I was afraid you would be nervous about me, or that you would argue and try to deter me from my purpose. I find that duty *compels* me to go at once to Liverpool. Prepare yourself

for a piece of very startling news. I have every reason to believe that your father's and my father's elder brother is still living, and that he has been grievously wronged all his lifetime. If the information which I have is correct, he is the man who has passed by the name of Reuben Sellwood. It is wonderful to me to think how he has conquered circumstances, considering that he never benefited by the education which all the rest of us received, and which, as a wise man used to say, begins from the day that 'the infant is something more than a mere animated vegetable.' There is a craze about heredity in the present day, but I think we have no reason to be ashamed of our uncle——"

Here Vere waited, balancing her pen in her hand.

She had been intending to add, "remembering that the characteristics of the vegetable are the same, though its development may be altered." But there was no occasion to discuss this opinion with Henriette, who could certainly not in the least understand her. It was better to add:

"His vulgarity has been on the surface; I have never considered him to be really vulgar at heart, and, as to the things they say about him, I am certain that they are not true. Yet he is the victim of a vile conspiracy, and, if I do not seek him out and try to help him, it may be too late. I have a feeling that my grandfather and your father would urge me to do so; that conviction is so strong that I dare not disobey it. There is no occasion to confide in Mrs. Austin—yet. She knows the world better than I do, and it will be time enough for her to advise me as to what is best to be done when I can tell her the whole story more correctly."

To Godfrey she wrote:

"Your father is at Liverpool. He is hoping to preserve a disguise which he has assumed with the intention of protecting himself against men who have plotted to ruin him. I know now that he is my uncle, and that there should be really no necessity for constraint between us. As soon as I can I will put an end to the mystery, which I hope to do with your help. I seem to have known it more or less for years, though I could never speak to any one about it. There was a sort of likeness to my father and grandfather, more in complexion than in feature, which at times seemed inexplicable to me, especially of late years when he became by degrees gentler in speech, more quiet in his manner, and more tender in his treatment of women.

"He told me once that I had done him good, and that he was proud of my devotion to him. Need I say that I also am proud and thankful to him for his goodness to me? I can tell you no more now than that he is labouring under a cruelly

unjust accusation, that he is determined to disprove it, and that he is hoping to meet men in the States who may bring evidence to do so. I should like to tell him the truth before he starts."

Her pen hesitated here. Was it necessary for her to say more of her future intentions? If there was no need for constraint with Godfrey's father, there was reason for keeping Godfrey himself at a distance. Yet she wished to bring father and son together, and added, after short reflection :

"I cannot let my poor uncle be tempted to anything desperate. The ship will not wait while we are deliberating, and it is my desire, at least, to get a few words with him to soothe and quiet him, should no one else come to his assistance. But you surely will not let him sail alone. It is my conviction that he needs some one with him, to keep him from the determination to elude us all, or even from suicidal tendencies. I can tell you no more now than that he has been cruelly treated."

CHAPTER IX.

ALTHOUGH the two women started by an early train, it was late in the afternoon before they reached their destination, and the evening was already drawing in before they took the final step, after obtaining the necessary leave, of going on board the *Berkeley Castle*. The lateness of the hour was in itself unfortunate for Vere's purpose, but it was still more unfortunate that she was possessed of no clue which would have helped her to identify her uncle. She had been prepared for the fact that he had assumed a disguise—the boy had told her so much. But she had forgotten that he would probably change his name, and had not guessed that he would embark as a steerage passenger.

In the confusion and bustle on board the ship, with sorrowful leave-takings in the deepening twilight, it was not likely that Vere's perplexity would attract much attention. Rough

sailors pushed past her, carrying bales and boxes, and those whom she questioned turned away their eyes impatiently, after the truth had once been ascertained that there was no Mr. Sellwood among the passengers.

Jenny was worse than useless. The journey had already unhinged her, and now the sight of the dark masses of seething water which intervened between herself and the glimmering lamps that had just been lit on shore—with the ghostly look of the tall masts of the shadowy vessel, and the dread of becoming entangled in the ropes which seemed to be like live things to catch people's feet—increased her bewilderment and dismay.

On the deck people and things had become difficult to distinguish. The tragedies which were being enacted were veiled by the merciful dusk. Yet the hand-clasps, the tearful farewells, and the look of desolation on some of the faces as they tore themselves away from the "old familiar scenes," and endeavoured to say a calm good-bye to friends whom they might never meet again on earth, were all-engrossing to those who took part in them. None of the crew had a thought to give to the affairs of disconsolate strangers. Vere and her companion remained unnoticed, with no one to warn them that they incurred a risk of being forgotten, as Miss Rashleigh suggested at last to her maid that it would be better to make some inquiry as to the names of those in the cabins to which a few of the passengers had already retired for rest.

A bell rang as they were creeping back again, disappointed, up the companion ladder. But though Vere quickened her footsteps, saying, "I suppose we must give it up—it is useless to search for him any more," she had never thought it possible that the boatmen—to whom she had given explicit directions, and who were now hurrying the strangers with scant courtesy into the boats—would think of pushing off without her. And Jenny, whose nervousness had increased, and whose fears of being separated from her young mistress were now added to her renewed horror of being entangled in the ropes or struck by the boxes, proved to be a greater hindrance than ever to all rapid movement.

"If Mr. Godfrey had bin 'eer—it might ha' bin different," muttered the woman, discontentedly, as she found herself wedged for a moment in the crowd, close to another woman with a baby, which she was afraid of hurting.

"Yes, if we had had a gentleman it would have been better," admitted Vere, who was unable to confide to a servant that she herself was sore at heart on account of young Mr. Sellwood's unaccountable tardiness in obeying the summons of her telegram, and feeling at the same time how very much she pre-

ferred not having been obliged to travel by the same train with him. She had been aware of this duality in her mind concerning him in past days, and reproached herself for her old inconsistency of feeling.

"If he had come by the next train, as I thought he would, I should have been able to tell him at once that we have lost the clue. But, if he had meant to come, he ought to have been here by this time—as it is, he will just miss; and who can tell whether my worst fears may not be realised?" she thought to herself, sadly.

Just at that moment a lantern, which was held by one of the ship's crew, flashed upon the faces of the people who were near her, and she no longer heard the voices calling or attended to the movements of the crowd. Jane—who was watching her mistress closely, with the increasing and not unfounded fear of being separated from her—could not tell why Miss Rashleigh held unaccountably back, while others pushed forward. There was nothing startling to the maid in the appearance of an old, close-shaven man, wearing a coarse serge suit, and with a seal-skin cap pushed so closely over his brows as almost to hide his eyes. But Vere was saying to herself:

"If I had not heard the story of his birth before, I *must* have known him by the likeness now. Surely he must see it himself when he looks in the glass—the likeness of the lines of the mouth and chin to my uncle Ralph—only *his* mouth was weaker, and—to the pictures of my father."

She tried to reach the man, who seemed to wish to elude her, uttering a sudden exclamation as she tore the veil from her face. But as she did so he disappeared. Could it be possible that Reuben Sellwood had hidden himself from her intentionally; that he did not wish to be followed even by his son; that he intended to preserve his disguise and perhaps to deny his identity? Had she allowed her impulses to mislead her in trying to help him in his difficulty, and in supposing that circumstances were altered because he was so closely related to her?

Before Vere had time to answer these questions which crowded into her mind, a new sort of fright assailed her. The decks were suddenly clearer. There was no longer the sound of the bell. Could it be possible that the boats which had been a few minutes before alongside were already full and had started without her? She strained her eyes to see over the intervening space of water, which had rapidly risen during the last quarter of an hour, and which had been for some time thronged with small boats. At the same moment a new horror that the ship was moving came upon her confusedly, and made her cry to one of the men who seemed most likely to give assistance:

"Stop the boat—stop it—we shall be left behind."

"Lor', miss," was the answer, "there's no more boats going now. They've a'ready weighed anchor."

"What could I have been thinking of?" cried Vere, in self-reproach. "Surely it is not too late—they will send another boat."

The men only shook their heads, while Jane, in whom the seeds of rebellion had been developing for some time, and who would have needed some much slighter provocation to make her lose the little self-control which remained to her, rushed wildly to the ship's side, flourishing first of all her pocket-handkerchief, and then her shawl. Finally—discovering that all her efforts and screams for assistance were of no avail—she collapsed in a hysterical fit, to the amusement of some of the sailors, and the pitying perplexity of a few of the passengers.

Meanwhile the captain, whom Vere had sought, remained inflexible to all entreaty. The wind was high, and as the ship sailed majestically out of the harbour the white surf could be seen in the "glimpses of the moon," and Vere could understand the difficulty there would have been in putting back. There were some humiliations for her to bear—one of the worst being the way in which Jane took the misadventure. But even the fussy lamentations of the latter were not without their advantages, as these were the means of attracting the attention of sympathetic people. One of the kindest among the women proffered assistance. She was a widow with several children journeying to the States, and she pressed on Miss Rashleigh's acceptance a berth in her cabin. Others made no difficulty in providing for the still sobbing Jane, or in offering changes of clothing till the vessel should stop at some port.

"'Tain't as large as most o' the reg'lar passenger-ships," explained one of the more confidential of the crew; "there ain't much accommodation, and capen, he's already been put about by that 'eer boat which put off from the 'arbour when the ship was a'ready starting."

"Ay, a foolhardy gen'l'man—must have paid heavy fees to the boatmen; they rowed with a will to catch the steamer, and he up the side o' the ship, and in in a jiffey, while the bell was a-ringing, t'other folks going off, and the captain swearing that he'd take no one else in."

"Time and tide wait for no one," commented the first speaker, with a shake of the head, as he looked at Miss Rashleigh; and, from the further remarks which were made, Vere had no difficulty in gathering that Godfrey Sellwood must have arrived, after all, just at the time when she herself had been absent from the deck, and that he was probably now doing his utmost to search for his father.

Her unwillingness to inflict her own trouble upon him made her more ready to accept the offer of the lady, who seemed really to require assistance with her children. But on the following morning, as she stood looking a little hopelessly at the expanse of rushing and receding waves, she was startled by the sound of Godfrey's voice. There seemed to be a sort of gladness in it which he was unable to conceal, as—having heard some of the other passengers making themselves merry at the accident which had befallen two unprotected females—he had hastened to try to make her see the bright side of the apparent disaster.

"You know you used to say you would like a sea-voyage, and that you wished to see America. I am sure you will go with us all the way," he said, as they talked together of their plans, and of what was best to be done in the case of Reuben continuing to avoid his son.

"I stayed at Tarringmoor till the middle of the day to save appearances. By that time we could tell pretty well which way the poll was going, matters, of course, being entirely altered when my father's name was withdrawn from the contest."

"That in itself was a bitter disappointment to him."

Godfrey answered by explaining his own theory that the rapid succession of untoward events had been too much for his father's brain, and that if Reuben was suffering, as he feared he might be, from some transient affection of the nervous system, it would be best to humour him in maintaining his disguise, winning his confidence by degrees, and then telling him Vere's story.

In accordance with this plan, the two tried to avoid the appearance of seeming to watch the fugitive, and indeed kept aloof to a certain extent from each other.

The fact that Reuben was said to be suffering from headache, and seldom showed himself till the darkness came on, even on the steerage part of the deck, seemed to favour Godfrey's hypothesis that his father was ill, or, at least, that he had good reasons for wishing to preserve his privacy. So that, with the exception of a sympathetic glance at the beardless face—which was at first a little difficult to recognise, with the hair shaven off so that it was easy to see in the lines of the chin and mouth, as well as in those of the somewhat high-bridged nose, the likeness which Vere's quick eye had detected—the son passed him in respectful silence. He had sent letters to his father assuring him of his deference to his wishes, and of his readiness to observe the line of conduct indicated by him; but as yet he had received no answer.

So days passed, and the *Berkeley Castle* ploughed its way

over the waves on its voyage to America. The passage had been so far a rough one, and several of the ladies had been confined to their cabins since the shores of England had receded from view. But a few, who seemed to rejoice in the freshness of the wind and a sight of the big waves, remained continually on deck. Among them was Vere, who laughed at herself in the character of an interloper, and who had written to Mrs. Austin an amusing account of her somewhat awkward adventure. She had managed to make friends with the mothers who had children on board, and occupied herself with taking care of the little ones when most of the mothers were incapacitated.

After a time the wind seemed somewhat to abate. The sea was dark and oily, with glimmers here and there of phosphorescent light. The ship still pitched a little, but the waves were shorter, and no longer broke in coils of spray which were shattered by the wind, whilst as the evenings drew on the sky was thick with stars.

"It is a good thing to be able to talk a little without roaring as if through a speaking-trumpet," said Godfrey's voice one evening.

"I have been blaming myself for sending you that telegram. Why did you attempt to reach the ship, after the signal had been given her to start, and when the night was so dark? I have heard the people here say it was at the risk of your life," answered Vere, remorsefully.

"I assure you there was no danger in it. And if there had been, could I have done less? You cannot conceive the agony I suffered when I knew that *you* were exposing yourself for my father's sake, and that I had been left at home like a milksop doing nothing. The thing was impossible."

She was silent. There had been moments when she was vexed with herself for having come on this errand of mercy at all. Would she not have done the same for any of her fellow-creatures who were in trouble or in danger, but did not Godfrey hint plainly that he had thought a good deal not only of his father but of *her* being in the ship? He was evidently pleased that she had not returned, and was it not possible that he attributed the motive to her which would probably be attributed by the world in general, and against which she had already been attempting to guard herself by writing a letter to Henriette as well as that to Mrs. Austin which she intended to post on the first occasion, and in which she entreated her cousin to tell the whole truth at Tarringmoor, as nothing was so conducive to ill-natured gossip as telling half-truths which could be misconstrued. Everything about the supposed Reuben Sellwood's real parentage, and Godfrey's claim

without any purchase to the property, must come to the surface now—the sooner the better. Yet Vere reproached herself for thinking so continually of what was best for Godfrey, when she could not be sure that he thought about her. The juxtaposition into which they were now sometimes thrown made it difficult for her to exclude him from her mind.

“You try to keep me at arm’s length, as my poor father keeps us both. I know that I have no longer right to come near you, now that his honour and mine may be irreparably stained.”

“Don’t say that,” she cried a little impetuously. “Whatever your father may have done, it cannot affect you.”

“The world thinks differently.”

“Never mind the world. Besides, it is my opinion you may be proud of your father. He is scared at present, as if some terrific calamity were really overhanging him, and he is determined to avert it. If his education had always been like yours, and he understood more about these things, he would treat these villains with the disdain with which they ought to be treated.”

“You may read something which I cannot unravel,” he said, a little sadly; “shallow people may misjudge him, but you were never shallow.”

Had he yielded to his feelings he would have liked to have taken her hand in his tender clasp, and blessed her for her goodness to his unhappy father. He could only thank her through the unsympathetic vehicle of the eyes.

“There is nothing so wrong as you think,” she said, presently. “I wish I could help you. You have already heard the woman Elspeth’s story and I have given you the proofs. The neighbours are ready to bear witness to the fact that she was your father’s nurse.”

“The story doesn’t so very much matter, but it wants the connecting links, and outsiders, you know, may discredit it on account of the advanced age of the witness. When women are over ninety and the memory is weak——”

He did not finish the sentence, and she made no direct reply. Something held her back and made it impossible.

“To tell the truth, I should not care at all about proving it. I have so used myself to the idea of belonging to the people—and—there is something about which I care so very much more that all other things dwindle into insignificance beside it.”

He stopped, but she did not help him. If she cared for *him* at all, if her indifferent manner concealed a secret feeling, he could have no suspicion of it. Yet it is strange what fancies get into one’s head when one is heart-sick. And as his watchful,

anxious eyes were fixed on her, keen with the instinct of love, he saw, faint as the light was, her pale face and her eyes wet with some new emotion.

"Did you not guess that one of the reasons why I came home again was because of you?" he cried, with sudden passion in his voice. "Why should we prevaricate with each other? You may not want any new interests—you may take life as it is—and be content with all the kind acts which you perform for others. But I? My heart has cried out to you in the exile of all these years."

"Don't speak of that," she said, piteously. "I don't know quite what you mean. If you were in exile, it was I who was to blame for it. I ask your pardon. I did what I thought was my duty then. I suppose we have most of us done what is wrong in our lifetime, and I ought not to have arrogated to myself the right of——"

She was going to add, "Of interfering—even though I felt that I should lower myself by consenting to have anything to do with such a compact."

But it did not seem possible to refer to the past mistake, especially with the remembrance that the man who had planned it was at this time broken down himself, and that he had taken refuge in flight rather than face a scandal.

"It was not your fault—it was only your misfortune—don't trouble over it any more," Godfrey entreated. For at that moment the fear of his father's guilt seemed to be lowering on him from the sky, and the stains on his horizon made him afraid to look at the pure, clear stars which gazed down on him like severe eyes, and made the remembrance of that time of penance in London seem comparatively light.

"I do not know why you talk of such things now," she said, with her old sadness stealing over her. "You had a great deal to go through then—and now you have this mystery to solve about your father's birth—and the trouble about his losing that election—you seem to forget about all these minor things, though you attach too much importance to the scandal they raised about him. I don't know, after all, what you really care for."

"I care for nothing but you," he said, in a voice she never forgot, and which left her no more room for doubt. She started at the sound of it. Her first impulse was to quicken her pace to the other side of the ship where some of the passengers were walking. Her next to stand still and rally her dignity. The announcement was surprising for a variety of reasons, and she could not keep the sarcasm out of her voice, as she said, with an attempt at speaking lightly :

"How long have you found that out?"

"Ever since you sent me from you. It was *my* fault to go on hoping, though you gave me no hope."

"You have been very silent."

"My silence was deliberate. I wished to know if you had remained unchanged. I had based such hopes upon——"

"Don't hope at all," she answered, thinking of Henriette, so that the answer was given proudly, with her eyebrows drawn together.

He bowed and made way for her as she walked quickly away from him towards the cabin.

Mute and unappealing he sat, half stunned and blinded, his reason refusing to take in the reality of her decision.

"I never dreamt of love, but for one woman, and she has cast me off," he said to himself, in a slow, uncertain way, which made him notice, as in a dream, the change in the weather.

The sea, which had been heavy for days, was becoming more and more still. The stars were now completely veiled in a canopy of cloud, and a dense, impenetrable fog, making it difficult to see eight or ten yards ahead, was enveloping even the ship's company in a darkness which might be felt.

"I don't like the look of the weather," the captain observed to some one, unconscious of a listener. It was impossible for Godfrey to see that the other man was his father, but he recognised the voice in a conversation which followed, and in which Reuben, as usual, showed his practical foresight.

"If he is in trouble, I have a right to share it with him," he thought, with a half-formed intention of getting up from the seat on which he had hidden himself, and endeavouring, under cover of this darkness, to force some explanation from the father who eluded him.

Meanwhile, in the cabin—which she shared with the lady who was going out to the States to rejoin her husband—Vere was endeavouring, as usual, to assist with the children.

"There are plenty of other things for a woman to do besides marrying. I have a perfect right to decide on never marrying, if it suits me. Of course, I can never marry any other man but Godfrey. But Henriette fancies him, though she pretends that she does not," she was thinking to herself, as she attempted to calm the peevish infant, whose mother—but just recovered from the agonies of sea-sickness, and delighting in the change of weather—was sitting up for the first time, looking rather helpless.

Surely it was a lapse from her usual consistency for her to think for a moment of veering from the plan which, in her strict sense of duty, she had marked out for herself. And yet, to see a strong man in such evident pain had been agonising to her.

It was all most perplexing, the more so that a voice within seemed to say to her :

"Beware, if you deaden human love ; the divine may no longer be able to exist."

It was perhaps a morbid fancy, but she began to feel as if she had treated Godfrey badly. She had reasoned perhaps from false premises. Henriette might have flirted with him. It was characteristic of that little school-girl to be very willing, like another Miranda, to open her heart, in simplicity, to the first Ferdinand that came. But if the flirting had been on one side, after all, could Vere do better than commit herself to the loyalty of the man who had loved her so long and faithfully ?

When the baby slept at last, she lay down in her berth, but not to sleep. Her thoughts were occupied with anxiety as to what was best to be done about Reuben. For though she possessed much of that spiritual alchemy by which a heart that is accustomed to rest on God can transmute even its own troubles into joy, the troubles of others pressed hardly on her.

"I cannot force him to speak to me against his will ; that would be unwomanly," she thought, a little sadly. "His is a mind to hold on tightly to anything which he has undertaken."

She had not the faintest conception of what Godfrey could mean by hinting that his father would not be proud to have it proved that his had ever been the title by right, and that he had been the elder and legitimate son of her grandfather—and another George Rashleigh. That some other sad story was weighing on his mind, not associated with this mystery of Reuben's birth—a story which he would willingly let sleep, and the recollection of which sometimes would cleave its way like a lightning flash to his poor heart—was suddenly remembered by her, and for the first time she saw that she had possibly been guilty of imprudence, if not of self-will, in undertaking to help the man whom she supposed to be her uncle.

She who thought of personal human life as of the development of the soul, and who believed in dormant forces for purification, leading to strenuous efforts after good—such as she hoped had been lately roused in Reuben's nature—thought very tenderly of him, making excuses for his new and shamefaced desire to keep out of notice, as she lay musing in her wakefulness. That a character should be stirred to its depths, the real ore sifted and discovered in the hope of final deliverance from evil, was, according to her way of thinking, one of the best things which could happen, by whatever means, in the moral evolution of a human being.

"After all, he cannot hold out long," she reflected. "He will be sure, sooner or later, to speak to Godfrey."

She had always felt that the love which this rough man had for his son, however it might have been warped for the gratification of his own selfish desires, was still love, and as such ennobling.

"He loves Godfrey still—he will not avoid him long—it is only a shame-faced pride, and a sort of stunned feeling which makes him keep out of his way now," she reflected further. "I do not believe in that theory about the weakening of the brain. At any rate, Godfrey's father seems to have made friends with the captain—perhaps because it was not possible for him to avoid *him* without exciting notice."

Although she did not know it, the mutual reserve which had so often been unfortunately kept up between the father and the son was being conquered that very night, when in close converse together Reuben and Godfrey were helping the captain to keep a careful look-out on deck. There seemed to be no need to apprehend danger, for Captain Herrick, who appeared to be fully equal to the emergency, had decided that under the present circumstances it would be better not to attempt to make headway, but to reduce speed from eleven knots to a pace which was slow. There seemed to be little for any who were willing to do. For Mr. Herrick and his second officer were themselves on the bridge, and the pilot in charge was also looking out. Vere, who was lying sleepless below, wondered at the sound of bells which from time to time resounded in the darkness, blended with other sounds which she did not know to be fog-horns. Then suddenly a low rumbling, as of a vessel approaching, was heard. And peeping through the port-hole, which was close to her sleeping-berth, she saw something dark looming out of the fog, moving quickly through the water. She lay down again in an instant, and then a tremendous shock, upsetting everything in the cabin, and succeeded by a splashing of water, was followed by a cry from the terrified mother—something like she had fancied a woman's cry might be if she were shot through the heart. It was re-echoed as soon as uttered by wails of distress, and other cries as piteous, from the other and larger cabin, and again that terrible rushing of water.

Vere was up in a moment, seizing two of the children. Fortunately the desire to minister to these little ones, whose mother was often so unable to help them, had caused her to form the habit of being provided with her dressing-gown. She wrapped herself in it now.

The lower part of the cabin was already wet with the water.

"Courage! we are in God's hands. Take the baby and follow me," she said, almost sternly, to the mother, whose

sense of the present danger seemed to be numbing her faculties.

At the same time she heard Godfrey's voice. He cried :

"Is it all right below? Have you sprung a leak?" helping her and her terror-stricken fellow-passenger with a coolness of decision which left no time for further questioning.

The scene on deck was one of terrible confusion. Some of the lady passengers who had been aroused from sleep, with no time to put on warmer clothing, were rushing backwards and forwards wildly imploring help, whilst others retained more of their presence of mind, and some of the more active of the men—Reuben's figure conspicuous in the emergency—were endeavouring to marshal them into appointed places. Vere did not require to be told that there had been a tremendous collision, and that the bow of a formidable steamer, which was still looming through the darkness, had pierced the side of the *Berkeley Castle*, which had already heeled half over, laying her bulwark and port close down to the water. Nor did it seem as if the commander of the other steamer would be able to render much assistance, for the ship had rebounded from the violence of the shock, and could be but faintly seen through the fog. Lifebelts and other appliances were being served out—the boats swung on the davits, and every preparation made for getting them lowered with safety.

Meanwhile the emergency was more critical than had at first been expected. The vessel sank lower in the water, and Godfrey—who by Vere's request had put the frightened mother and her little ones, with Jane and others of the passengers and crew, into the first boat which was pushed off—turned in anxiety to her.

The fog was by this time beginning to lift, and the east was touched with the splendour of the rising sun, revealing the full horror of the situation. Some of the crew had already climbed the rigging, and, with faces ghastly in their pallor, were calmly awaiting the result, while two of the officers with others of the crew were putting on their life-belts, and preparing to take to the water.

Meanwhile the purser and the steward, with some of the passengers to help him, among whom the Sellwoods were conspicuous, had been assisting most of the women into other boats, one of which was whirled away in the darkness, and one was in considerable danger of being capsized as it was crowded by men who jumped into it without orders.

The last boat was now ready to be lowered. Godfrey looked at Vere, who had held back till now, whilst others were pushing forward, but who was now deadly pale, with her lips

blue and trembling, though she tried to take the most cheerful view of the situation.

"There is not a minute to lose," he said, in a choking voice; "they helped your maid down the ladder, but now you must jump to save your life."

"Where is your father?" she asked, looking round.

"I will see to my father afterwards. Thank Heaven he is a good swimmer. I saw him a few minutes ago, more active than any one in assisting the helpless. There is no one who knows better how to meet these emergencies, for no one has weathered more dangers than he has in his past life. You will do him no good if you stay to search for him, and it may be too late to save yourself," he answered, with the huskiness of voice which grated on her ear.

"I came to take care of him," she repeated, a little obstinately, straining her brave eyes for Reuben. "God who has helped me hitherto will spare us. I am not afraid."

"Quickly now—there is no time to be lost—you must do as I tell you," he cried, almost passionately, as, grasping her, he lifted her off her feet. "Steady there, lads, the lady first," he called, as he lifted her, and the men standing at the bow of the boat caught her as, yielding to his instructions, she let herself fall from his arms into those outstretched to receive her.

He had intended to wait, and make another effort to save his father. But at that moment a whiff of wind caught the sinking ship, and hastened its fate. And a little exclamation of pain from Vere, who had grazed her side in her descent against one of the timbers of the sinking vessel, made further calculation impossible. He flung himself to her assistance and helped to push off the boat, which was not more than two lengths from the steamer when the ship sank suddenly by the stern and disappeared.

A voice sang out "Good-bye" as the vessel went down. It was the voice of Reuben, who was clinging to some of the lower part of the rigging. A terrible dread shot through Godfrey's heart. But a few minutes before, when he had seen his father coolly giving orders to some of the more bewildered of the passengers, he had counted on his presence of mind to do the best for himself. Now, as he waved his hand, and said "good-bye," a sick fear occurred to him that Reuben—in his weariness of life, his unwillingness to face the future, and his aching feeling of the irksomeness of it all—might be glad to escape not only to America, but out of the difficulties of life altogether.

The other occupants of the boat thought that Godfrey was beside himself as—shouting in answer, "It is *not* good-bye.

Hold on till I come to help you!"—he flung himself into the water just after the ship had gone down.

Amongst all the thrilling incidents of that dreadful morning there was none more pathetic than the story of the son who had risked his life to save his father. When the passengers in the boats had been received into the other steamer, and when successful efforts had been made to pick up others of the crew—who had been found floating about, having seized hold of any wreckage or spar which was at hand—the two men were descried clinging to the boat which was bottom upwards, and which had been overturned in the hasty efforts made to load it. It then appeared that the older man's power of swimming had deserted him. He had been struck by some portion of the rigging, and, had not Godfrey managed to support him in the water till the boat was reached, he must inevitably have gone down with the few who had been lost.

"Thank God," said Godfrey, on the following day, when he broke the news to Vere, who—in common with the other women who had been rescued from the wreck—had experienced the greatest kindness from the captain and crew of the vessel which had been the cause of the disaster. "Thank God that we shall be able to brighten the remaining years of his life. He was not selfish or ignoble, and his has been a troubled life—*how* troubled we can scarcely know," he added, unconscious of his somewhat curious use of the "we," and speaking with deep emotion, as he looked involuntarily up to the sky, blue and clear after the fog of the preceding day.

Vere was reclining upon a basket-chair on deck, wrapt in the warm coverings which had been lent to her. Her mind was a little confused from all that she had gone through, but, as her eyes followed the direction of his, she drew a long, sobbing breath.

Neither spoke of the thoughts present to the minds of both—thoughts of the unclothed spirits which had been in their company but a few hours before, and were now—*where*? Far above and beyond them, millions of miles away, beyond the sun and beyond the stars? A thrill, very strange and solemn, seemed to pass over the woman's nerves as she remembered the one little child among those dead, who had kissed her the day before, and who had solved the great riddle, and knew infinitely more now than the wisest men on earth could know of that change.

"Are you thinking about *that*, too?" she asked, drawing another deep breath, but conscious at the same moment, from the expression of Godfrey's face, of some newly-discovered point of sympathy which made speech unnecessary.

"About what?" he faltered, knowing that he answered stupidly.

"About something which one can feel, but cannot articulate. Perhaps it belongs to the other language which we have not yet learnt. But how it comforts one to believe in a merciful Father, and to feel sure that Love overrules all!"

He nodded—and though neither of them said that, in the clear light of Eternity, they might one day find that what men call death may be only that fuller life which He "who loved us into life" came to give His people "more abundantly"—neither thought it necessary to express the sentiment. There are moments too solemn for human talk.

"The captain—he was kind to me?" asked the girl, very softly.

"His last thought was for others. He died doing his duty."

"A little sooner than ourselves. I often wonder what it must be to be beginning to learn that new tongue and really to *see*," she said, after a pause—the eyes which had been blinded by a gush of tears shining now with a soft light.

"I think I ought to tell you," she added, turning again, after a few minutes, to Godfrey, "that some one said you were a splendid fellow, and ought to have a public testimonial."

"My father did more than I did," he answered, gravely, but his voice was not quite steady.

And it was then that she noticed an indefinable something in his manner, which made her understand that he had more to break to her; and the happy, trustful light—which, as she sat with folded hands during that interval of silence, had seemed to grow brighter and brighter, as if it would irradiate her face—suddenly went out.

"Your father?" she exclaimed, interrogatively, with still that determination to master her overstrung nerves which made her press her hands tightly together.

"Did they not tell you? His spine has been seriously injured. He will never go to America. I shall have to go for him."

"Is there—anything—I can—do?" she asked, after another pause, with the old impulse strong upon her which had ever made her so ready to cope with emergencies, so full of immediate courage and enterprise. "Did he send me—any—message?"

All that Godfrey had studied to say in preparation for such a question, which she would probably put, went clean out of his mind at the critical moment. He had been driven into a corner, and could only answer simply:

"He said that the dearest wish of his heart was to see us—as soon as possible—man and wife. Need I repeat what I told you the other night—that I always have loved you, and always shall, and that I never shall cease caring for you, and

never cared in that way for any one else? And then, till I can prove his right to the title, and communicate with friends in the States—who, it seems, can do much to clear up this scandal, knowing what liars and blackguards these ruffians are—you—you would be able to take care of my father—like a daughter.”

She was silent, and he continued :

“Ah, I could send to Mrs. Morton to help you, but I see it is asking too much. I did not speak out at the right time, because I was led to imagine that you had promised to marry my friend. And, now that the delusion has been dispelled, most women would consider that I had offered them an affront in asking them to marry a man who is somehow under a cloud. Only that I thought you were different from most women, and that the anguish of uncertainty compelled me to speak out——”

“Don’t you judge a little hastily about *most* women?” she interrupted, in that direct way in which her simple nature let all her true impulses sway her. “And I—I who owe you some reparation—do you think anything could give me greater pleasure than to nurse your father?”

THE END.

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